IN GOLDEN FLAME

ACT 2 PRE-ALPHA

PLEASE NOTE that Act 2 is nowhere close to complete. This document is full of placeholder content or stuff I fully copy-pasted from Act 1 just for formatting purposes. This is released only so that people currently running IGF campaigns have foreknowledge and somewhere to go after they finish Act 1.

Nothing is finished. Almost anything in this book might change.

A Campaign for LANCER

IN GOLDEN FLAME

ACT 2

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LANCER

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CAUGHT IN THE GLARE

As Kileyna Morton glimpses Calliope's star, they think about how much scarier sunlight is than most people give it credit for.

People talk about the "cleansing" power of sunlight all the time, about how it's the best cure for lies, as if lies were vampires that the pure light of day could banish. Kileyna thinks about how that reflects a planet-centric worldview. On a planet, you usually have a thick atmosphere and a magnetic field to shield you from what sunlight really is.

Out here in the shuttle, there's just a thin skin of metal and polymer standing between them and enough ionizing radiation to kill them in hours – not that they'd get the chance to die that way, since the thermal flux would boil their skin and set fire to their bones. *Sure*, Kileyna thinks, *sunlight cleanses. We're made of what it washes away.*

That line of thought troubles them, so they drop it, focusing instead on the long, sleek silhouette of the *Thames* looming large in the shuttle's forward scopes as it makes its final approach. Despite it having been in the system for half a decade now, Kileyna has never set foot on it in before, and never expected to; any business that needed to be conducted with the Navy's token presence could be handled over omni.

Kileyna thinks back on how hard a battle they had to fight just for this single, solitary ship to be here at all. The weeks spent in interminable subcommittees and budget allocation meetings. The speeches and the campaigning, trying to make Union live up to the Pillars the revolution fought so hard for. The endless paperwork, filing and refiling again and again. The hours of cat-and-mouse, chasing bureaucrats to make sure their submissions couldn't be forgotten.

In that light, it feels somehow insulting that Union would deign to schedule a meeting on it. *Oh, now you care? Now you notice? I had to fight you tooth and nail just to get this ship here at all, and now* you *invite* me *aboard? Presumptuous bastards.*

That train of thought is interrupted as the docking clamps engage and the entire shuttle rattles. A few seconds pass, and then there's another rumble and a hiss as the umbilical seals to the airlock.

The voice of the pilot cuts in through Kileyna's helmet. "All passengers please be aware that the UNS-CV *Thames* is not currently under thrust. Per Union Navy regulations, magboots must be worn at all times while aboard this vessel, except in designated sleeping and hygiene areas."

The pilot goes on to talk about shipboard time, but Kileyna's already unbuckling from their seat. They're still recovering from the bolt they took to get here; Union needed them to attend a meeting *immediately* but it was far too much of an imposition to ask the *Thames* to come to them, of course.

The moment the airlock opens, Kileyna is through the door, drumming their thumb against the finger of their other hand as they wait for the system to cycle.

The outer door slides open, revealing the docking umbilical, and without delay, Kileyna steps forward, their magboots clicking loudly as they walk. The umbilical is fully pressurized, but long-standing Calliopean superstition says you never take your helmet off until you reach a station or ship "proper." There's about ten meters of walking before they reach the outer door of the *Thames'* airlock.

As they're waiting for the second airlock to cycle, a calm, level voice with a vaguely masculine affect speaks from overhead. "Identity verified: Civilian Liaison Kileyna Morton, Bureau of Orbital and Non-Terrestrial Management. Access granted."

Beyond the airlock stands a tall, athletic woman, her long, dark brown hair tied back in a ponytail and the wings of a Union Navy Captain pinned to her lapel. She snaps into a formal posture as Kileyna enters, a gesture her attendants quickly mirror. "Esteemed Liaison, welcome aboard the *Thames*." There's a flurry of salutes.

Kileyna smiles, shaking their head. "Captain Ordaz, I'm not an Administrator. You don't have to salute."

The captain turns to her subordinates, barks "at ease," and turns back to Kileyna. "You put in twice as much work for half the benefits. They should give you the goddamn title as an honorary."

Kileyna strides up and shakes her by the hand, and it quickly turns into an enthusiastic – if slightly awkward – embrace. "You have no idea how good it is to finally see you in person, Mercy."

The captain grins, patting Kileyna on the back. "Funny that we only found time for it when things got busy, huh? Are you holding up well?"

Kileyna grimaces, cracking their neck. "Well, they pulled me out of bed and told me to take a boltship out here, so honestly, I could be better. Do you know what this is about?"

“I think the penny’s finally about to drop, and they’re going to tell us what we already know. Come on.” Mercedes gestures for the liaison to follow. “The meeting space is set up, and you know the Committee don’t like to be kept waiting.”

As they make their way through the ship, Captain Ordaz plays the tour guide in a limited capacity, pointing out parts of the ship they pass and explaining their function. The whole place is constantly in motion: sailors rush to and fro, hauling equipment or carrying hardcopy documents. Flight decks buzz with activity as strike craft and smaller subline vessels are prepped for takeoff or serviced after landing.

Kileyna stops a moment to inspect a sleek GMS corvette that’s currently being serviced after what looks like extensive battle damage. “Running you pretty hard out here, aren’t they?”

“Don’t even get me started,” Ordaz growls, watching as the mangled remains of an Everest are hauled out of the corvette’s cargo bay, piece by piece. “This would be tough even for a whole battlegroup. I’ve got a single line carrier with five years of uptime on the clock. It’s not enough.”

Kileyna chuckles, a hoarse noise with no mirth to it. “Too much to do, and not enough to do it with?”

Ordaz flashes a rueful smirk. “Story of life in Calliope, I guess.”

One of the captain’s attendants raises his hand. “Ma’am, the Committee.”

Ordaz sighs, rolls her eyes and motions for Kileyna to follow again.

The secure meeting space is a small, circular room with only one point of entry and exit. To Kileyna, it looks a lot like a prison cell; another uncomfortable line of thought. Waiting inside is a short, pale, squirrelly man who looks like he hasn’t slept in weeks.

Kileyna does a double-take. “Jerry Masters?”

The man twitches like a startled rabbit.

A holographic figure materializes – a boyish androgyne dressed in a naval uniform. They speak in the same voice from the airlock. “Initiating Secure Communications Room lockdown. Outer door seals fully engaged. Integrity of EM cage confirmed. Integrity of hardwire connection to ship omnihook confirmed. We are locked down and secure. Standing by to connect on your order, Captain.”

Ordaz straightens her uniform a little. “You ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” Kileyna replies.

The captain nods. “Make the call, Margate.”

The room’s plain metal walls melt away, replaced by a soaring parliament chamber, easily a hundred meters tall. The structure’s colossal support columns each bear the insignia of a Union Ring, and the banners of five thousand worlds are draped from its rafters in a riot of color, symbolism and life. Kileyna once again feels like they’re staring at the sun.

“Ah, good, you’re here.” The comment comes from a smartly-dressed, white-haired woman at a nearby podium, holding a gavel. “As Convener of the Central Committee of Union, I hereby bring this closed plenary session to order.” She bangs the gavel three times on the podium.

She continues. “In attendance, Civilian Liaison of the Bureau of Orbital and Non-Terrestrial Management in Calliope, Kileyna Morton.”

Kileyna bows.

“Captain Mercedez Ordaz of the Union Navy Ship, Carrier Vessel *Thames*, currently stationed in Calliope, and shipboard operations NHP Margate.”

Ordaz and Margate stand to attention and throw perfectly synchronized salutes.

“And Major Jerry Masters, acting Station Director of Hell’s Gate, Calliope, formerly of the 282nd Liberators, Union Department of Justice and Human Rights.”

Kileyna’s head snaps round, only to see that Ordaz and Margate are staring too. Jerry gives the most awkward, stiff salute Kileyna has ever seen.

“I now yield the floor to First Speaker Kabir Kshetri.”

A tall man with a perfectly-manicured beard stands and fixes all four guests with an icy stare. “Esteemed Liaison, Captain, Major, Ship-Mind. Before we discuss the business of the day, I want to clarify that this is a closed session; the public do not have access to the information that will be discussed, *nor will they*. Nothing we discuss today will leave this room without the explicit approval of the Committee. Is that perfectly clear?”

Ordaz and Margate throw salutes again, replying in unison. “Understood, sir.”

Kileyna simply bows their head in a deep nod. “Absolutely, First Speaker.”

“C-c-completely, sir,” stammers Jerry.

“Good,” the First Speaker replies. “What I’m about to share with this chamber has the potential to impact the security and continuance of Union itself. The four of you in particular have been extensively vetted to ensure that the trust Union is showing you by the exchange of this information is not misplaced.”

The First Speaker turns towards Jerry. “Major Masters. The Central Committee has done its own investigation, but for the record, please confirm the identity of this man.”

The holoprojectors display a new image: a tall, broad-shouldered man with a pale, scarred face, close-shaven black hair, his mouth twisted in a sneer of bilious contempt.

Jerry takes a deep breath. “I, well, th-that’s Andros Capella, f-former resident of Hell’s G-Gate station, and former l-l-leader of the Hell Hounds pirate gang.”

The image shifts, displaying a series of photographs. Low-resolution, grainy and pixelated, they depict the dim profile of a large, angular space vessel, the undocking and retreat of a small subline spacecraft, and then a violent explosion. Each photograph is marked “UNS-CV THAMES.”

The First Speaker turns to Ordaz. “Captain Ordaz, for the record, would you please confirm the source and nature of these images?”

Ordaz replies quickly and clearly. “These are pictures taken by my ship’s long-range visual imaging suite after being alerted to a situation unfolding in the outer system via omni. They depict a vessel of unknown class and origin, the retreat of the HG-0451 *Dragon’s Tooth*, a subline ship in service to Hell’s Gate, and finally, the detonation of the larger vessel.”

Kileyna raises their hand, gets a nod from the First Speaker, and begins to speak. “For the record, my office obtained telemetry from multiple sources throughout the system, and all the data corroborates this account. Hell’s Gate, the Icebreaker Borealis, Three Sisters, Asphodel Distributed Skywatch; they all saw the exact same thing from different angles and at lightspeed-consistent timestamps.”

The First Speaker nods, and motions to the projected image, which once again changes. A long series of still images and recorded video is displayed, depicting first the mystery ship from outside, clearly displaying its name, written in stark white letters: *Tachyon*.

Then there are a series of shots of its internals: airless, half-finished hallways lit only by the dim glow of emergency lighting. A corpse with a smashed visor, opposite a printer with a discharged pistol floating in its print bay. The doors of an NHP core module, burst open from the inside, deep rents in the metal that look like they were made by the claws of a giant bird.

The First Speaker’s brow furrows. “Major Masters. The source and nature of these images?”

“Uh, w-well,” Jerry mumbles, “this is a c-combination of, of, external c-c-camera footage from the *Dragon’s Tooth* – my, uh, my strategic response team’s ship – c-combined with, with, with recordings and s-still images f-f-from their mechs. They, uh, well, they went inside the sh-ship, and-and this is what they s-s-saw.”

The montage continues, reaching a climax: a pitched battle between those providing the point of view and a cluster of mechs painted black and red, bearing the symbol of a snarling mastiff. They are led by what is clearly a Harrison Armory Genghis Mark II, belching smoke and flame from every orifice.

The fight unfolds from multiple angles, and it seems pretty closely-matched until the tables turn suddenly. A lucky strike from one of the Gate’s mechs hits the Genghis right in its flamethrower, and the entire assembly erupts, angry green flame shooting the wrong way up its feed hoses into the fuel storage tanks on the chassis’ back. The footage whites out as Andros is obliterated in a pillar of blinding light.

There is a chime, and an automated voice announces a name. “Director Chantelle DePaul, Harrison Armory corporate representative.”

A spotlight illuminates a prim, attractive young woman in an aubergine suit, who begins speaking in a strident tone. “Harrison Armory demands the record clarify, in the strongest possible terms, that these images do not depict a common failure state of either the Harrison Armory Genghis Mark II or the Krakatoa Thermobaric Flamethrower. We believe this unit was modified post-purchase to use pentaborane-9 instead of the Armory’s proprietary fuel mix, an action which clearly violates its end-user license agreement.”

The First Speaker rolls his eyes and waves his hand dismissively. “Duly noted. Major Masters, would you please identify the mech that was destroyed?”

Jerry swallows hard, and then takes a deep breath. “That’s… that’s Andros Capella’s mech, sir.”

“For the record, how can you be sure?”

Jerry raises his hand, submitting two files for the Committee’s perusal. The first is a photograph which Kileyna recognizes instantly: the same mech they just saw, turning its flamethrower on a crowd of terrified protestors, its cockpit open so its smirking pilot can witness the carnage. This is an image Kileyna sees at least once a week in their nightmares.

Jerry's stammering becomes worse as he explains it. "This, this, this, this, is, um, this is, this is a, this is, this is a picture from the… the Strikebreak of '04. Um, m-many of you have, I think, probably, um, you've… well, you've already seen it. But that's Andros Capella. He, um, took credit for it, actually."

Some of the members of the Committee look away, or hide their eyes; Jerry's barb hit home. *Damn right they've seen it*, Kileyna thinks. *I showed it to them.*

The second file is video footage: the same man from the first picture, in the cockpit of a mech, blood running down his nose. He speaks in a guttural, stony growl. "Well, well, well. Look who it is. You're the ones who've been messin' with my outfit, ain'tcha? Not every day I get to kill two crabs with one wrench. Once you're outta the way, I can give the psycho this pile of junk and things will finally go back to normal."

Jerry concludes his point. "This was, this was a video transmission sent, um, sent right before the fight you just saw, to my strategic response team. That are the source of the footage. Um, of the fight that you just–"

"We understand, Major," the First Speaker replies, motioning to the projector.

The image shifts again, displaying the same man, inside the cockpit of a mech. This picture is watermarked in one corner with a cartoon drawing of a grinning face with platinum blonde hair and a cocky grin, next to the words "Live from the Long Rim."

"And the identity of this man, Major Masters," the First Speaker requests.

"Th-th-that's also, also Andros C-Capella, sir." Jerry's voice is suddenly a little clearer, a little less halting.

Another video with the same watermark appears: a mech, stepping out of a bubble of lensed space.

"And one more time, Major: identify this."

There is a prolonged silence, eventually broken by Jerry. "Th-that… is, once again, Andros Capella's mech, sir."

PLACEHOLDER

"For the duration of this crisis, this Committee has made the decision to grant you limited access to SOLEMN VIGIL clearance information."

Kileyna has never even heard of that clearance level before, but the way the Speaker says the words conveys a sensation of such weight that it's almost physical, pressing down on their shoulders.

"Liaison Morton, Major Masters, you will be required to set up secure compartmentalized information facilities at your workplaces. The Committee has already made budget allocations and prepared engineering specifications for this. You will interact with intelligence materials supplied to you exclusively within these facilities, and you will admit no individual to them who has not been vetted by the Committee."

"I'm, I'm, uh, I'm s-sorry, but I ca-can't promise that."

Ten thousand heads suddenly swivel towards Jerry Masters, and he looks like a man about to get washed away by the sun.

The First Speaker's eyes narrow. "Would you care to explain that comment, Major Masters?"

"You… uh, with all d-due respect, First Speaker, you clearly don't, don't understand how we, how we…" Jerry hyperventilates, struggling to get each word out. "How we do things out here. And that, well, with respect, that doesn't, that doesn't, it doesn't surprise me, b-b-because, well, with respect, because you never wanted to be here in the, in the first place."

Kileyna notices that Jerry's words are slowly getting steadier, an edge creeping into his voice.

"And, um, what-what-what I mean by that is, for going on three hundred years, Union has intentionally paid Calliope as little attention as it possibly could. You tell people not to come here, and if they do, you cut them loose, and th-then you act s-s-surprised that people who, who w-want nothing to do with you come here."

Kileyna looks at Ordaz. She's wearing an expression equal parts shocked surprise and gleeful delight.

"I have a team. You, um, well, I don't need to say 'you might have heard of them,' because I know you have. They're the only reason this situation isn't a thousand times worse. And I'll b-b-be the first to tell you some of them have, well, uh, to p-put it, to put it mildly… um, questionable backgrounds? I don't… know all of it? Perhaps I don't even want to? But I trust them without question, whether or not I know who they are. And th-th-they trust me. That team is the most powerful asset I can offer you. If you want me on side, then I'm going to need to ensure their privacy."

There is an immediate clamor of outraged voices. A spotlight shines on a man in the middle circles of the chamber as he stands, and the automated announcer names them as "Roshan Khel, Arcadia-3."

Khel gesticulates accusingly at Jerry. “Major Masters, you can’t seriously be asking that we just let you share sensitive intelligence with an unvetted team of mercenaries based entirely on your gut instinct!”

“That, uh, to b-b-be clear, Representative, is precisely what I’m asking you to do,” Jerry states, with jaw set and eyes narrowed. “Because, um, I was once sent on a mission where I didn’t understand the stakes, and wasn’t trusted to know why I was doing the things asked of me. It d-didn’t go well and I swore I would never, ever do that to s-someone else.”

Khel’s lip curls. “Then clearly, we made a mistake, thinking we could trust your discretion. First Speaker, I make an immediate motion for this man’s removal.”

“Then consider me out as well.”

All eyes are suddenly upon Kileyna, and they feel the sunlight of Union’s full attention licking at their flesh.

The First Speaker struggles to compose himself. “Excuse me, esteemed Liaison?”

“I quit,” Kileyna reiterates. “I tender my resignation. Or you can fire me, perhaps? Either way, I’m out.”

The Speaker sputters, trying to formulate a response. “Liaison, you can’t just–”

Kileyna does not feel the sun on their skin anymore. “Don’t you *dare* tell me what I can and can’t do when you’ve all spent the last forty years making it clear that you don’t give a *damn* about me or my work! Don’t you, mister Speaker, or any of this Committee’s representatives *dare* tell me that!”

An outraged representative stands from her seat, not even bothering to wait for the announcement of her name to finish before speaking. “Liaison Morton, we are in the middle of a potentially catastrophic crisis! Are you really going to endanger the entire system with your petty–”

Kileyna’s response comes out as a scream. “A crisis that you lazy, shiftless *motherfuckers* caused!”

There is a stunned silence, in which Kileyna can *physically feel* their career ending, so in the fashion that Calliope has taught them, they decide to go out doing the right thing. They sweep their hand dramatically, letting it linger over a few of the angriest-looking representatives.

“Everything happening in this system right now? It’s *your fault!* All of you! *You* did this, you and the people who sat in those chairs before you, *you* made this happen. *This* is what happens when you break your damn promises! *This* is what happens when you decide that some places just aren’t worth the effort!”

Kileyna takes a deep breath. “I didn’t *get assigned* to Calliope as Civilian Liaison. I *chose* to come out here, because I *believed* in the Utopian Pillars. I still do! In fact, I believe in them a whole lot more than some of you, because trust me, I remember *all* the faces of everyone in this room I had to *fight* to get the Neutral Omninode, the food aid, the water purifiers!”

It's not a lie; Kileyna remembers their names, their faces, and most importantly, where they sit. None of them can meet the Liaison’s gaze right now.

“During the Strikebreak on Impact Plaza, when the Hell Hounds were burning the families of labor organizers alive, I *begged* you to send in the Navy! When Rodericke Steele started charging *rent* for food people had *already eaten*, I *pleaded* on my hands and knees for the Department of Justice to intercede! And every time, every single time, this Committee has let down the people of this system, over and over and *over* again, because you just don’t *care!*”

It all comes pouring out: forty years of resentment, forty years of being ignored, forty years of fighting to get an organization whose entire *raison d'être* was caring to *actually care*, forty years of sleepless nights and overcaffeinated days, forty years of listening to stories of broken lives that could be fixed so easily if the money and resources had just *been there*.

“People are joining cults because the dream of Union is exactly that. It’s only as real to them as a dream, vanishing in a moment when they wake to the *nightmare* they have to live in!”

The sun is no longer glaring upon Kileyna Morton, it is glaring *from* them.

“You never gave a *shit* about Calliope before, but all of a sudden when there’s something that counts as a *‘real’* crisis by your high-and-mighty calculus, you hypocritical *bastards* suddenly sit up straight and pay attention, and you want to come in and fix it *your* way, *but it was your way that did this!*”

Captain Ordaz clears her throat and finally speaks up. “If they’re out, then I’m out too.”

The First Speaker whirls on her. “*You* are a member of the Union Navy! *You* do not get to just walk off the job, captain!”

Ordaz seems unimpressed. “Then court martial me. Give me a dishonorable discharge. Only months ago, Impact Dynamics was abducting innocent people so Rodericke Steele could hold a deathmatch. You all told me to wait for an Economic Bureau investigation.

A Bureau investigation! If Jerry's people hadn't intervened, hundreds would be dead! If we're not here to help people, why are we here at all?"

Within the Central Committee's parliament hall, there is not a single sound; somehow, Kileyna cannot even hear their own breathing. Kileyna watches seconds tick by on a gargantuan clock hanging from one of the hall's pillars, and though it takes less than a minute for someone to break the silence, it feels like years.

"They're right."

It's Maria Nóvoa, the representative for Meirionnydd, a colony in the Altai Line. A member of the New Solidarity Coalition, though not one whom Kileyna has had dealings with before.

"The Long Rim has always been a blind spot for us, and we chose to make it that way. We chose to make it a low priority – that wasn't something we had to do. We decided not to give it our attention, and now we're asking its people to fix a problem that wouldn't have happened if we'd cared as much as we should've."

There is a low, rhythmic two-note *thud-thud* sound that echoes through the chamber – one boot hitting the floor after the other, or open palms striking desks. This is the drumbeat of the New Solidarity Coalition, "the Heartbeat for Humanity." It begins to spread.

"Are we really going to throw away the best assets we have in Calliope out of pride? Because they won't do things exactly the way we want them to? Isn't that what we fought a revolution to be free of? This Third Committee of Union set out to help the people of the galaxy *without* deciding that we always knew best *how* to help. Is this not a test of our principles?"

Thud-thud. Thud-thud. Thud-thud. The entire NSC contingent is drumming now, and the beat has been taken up by members of the Verdant Social Arc and a few of the Interstellar's more adventurous souls.

"If the people of Calliope are in danger, then it is not just their right to know the shape of that danger, it is *our duty* to tell them! They're the ones who'll be fighting it! Not us, in our cozy apartments on worlds hundreds of light years away!"

Thud-thud. Thud-thud. Thud-thud.

PLACEHOLDER

The First Speaker breathes a sigh of relief. "Well, Major Masters, I'd say that went much better than expected. I think we more or less got everything we wanted out of this."

Kileyna takes a moment to collect themselves. "You *planned* this?"

The First Speaker grins ruefully. "I knew precisely what would be necessary for Major Masters to do his job properly. I also knew that, unless backed into a corner, the Committee would never acquiesce to it. I must say, it was gratifying that you and Captain Ordaz stepped up. Very noble of you. Risky, foolish, but noble – and ultimately, successful."

Ordaz frowns, chewing her lip. "Good to know I risked my career for your little theater production. Glad it worked, at least."

Jerry shrugs. "All politics is theater. It, um, it-it-it took a while, b-b-but I remembered, um, that I'm ac-ac-ac-actually a p-pretty g-good actor." He pauses for a moment, takes a deep breath, and then continues speaking devoid of his normal stammer. "I could probably do it a little more often if I tried, but… pulling myself together this much is exhausting, honestly."

Kileyna sighs wistfully. "Ugh. Tell me about it."

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2023, I released Act 1 of *In Golden Flame*. It was the first commercial project I'd ever done, and it was wild to me. I'd cobbled together a world and a tabletop campaign that took place in it from a story someone else had run for me, then convinced 300 people to back it on Kickstarter. It felt like I had to tack "somehow" onto that. *Somehow*, I'd done all these things. Ask me how it had worked, and I don't think I'd be able to explain it to you; it all just sort of *happened*.

But in retrospect, it had been a whole lot of hard work. Once the Kickstarter met its funding goal, I wasn't just doing a project for my own satisfaction anymore; I had a responsibility to deliver what I'd promised. I wasn't just a writer telling people about a cool idea I'd had; I was a project manager who had to provide results.

By the time Act 1 was finished, I'd learnt so much about so many things. I'd learnt the basics of accounting and the intricacies of spreadsheet formulae. Despite not being able to draw a stick figure, I'd had to serve as my project's art director. I learnt that to design a good game, I had to *understand how games are designed*, and that there was a field of study called "game design" that could help me with this.

Act 1 was a success: sales were good, opinions were positive and I felt proud of the product I'd created. But I knew that for Act 2, merely matching that success wasn't enough; I had to improve on it. I had a better idea of what I was doing now; I didn't need to be so timid in my design decisions, or with my writing. Act 2 needed to be bigger, bolder, funnier.

THE ESSENTIALS

To run this adventure, the GM will need a copy of the full *Lancer Core Rulebook.* Although not strictly necessary, it's highly recommended they also have a copy of *The Long Rim* supplement, as Calliope is part of the Long Rim and several plot aspects revolve around aspects discussed in the book. Both of these books are available at massif-press.itch.io along with a free version of the core rulebook that can be distributed to players. You will also need a copy of *In Golden Flame Act 1*.

In Golden Flame is designed for between 3 and 5 players, although my personal recommendation is 4. Balancing encounters so as to present a meaningful challenge for 5 players is quite difficult, and it's easy to overwhelm a 3-player group.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

It's useful if you can sum up the fantasy of a tabletop role-playing game in a sentence or two, so:

> **Calliope continues to spiral into chaos. As the Cult of the One works towards its promised Armageddon, new powers have arrived, pursuing their own mysterious agendas. Can you assemble an alliance in time to stop Feather and her resurrected champion, Andros Capella?**

There's a lot more to *In Golden Flame*, but this sums it up. As a GM, you and your players need to be on board with this basic concept – it's the "buy-in." That has to be something you want to run and that they want to play.

USING THIS BOOK

In this book, you will find Act 2 of *In Golden Flame*, including:

- A comprehensive guide to the Calliope system, a new setting for *Lancer* campaigns, whether it's *In Golden Flame* or something else, complete with detailed notes on its history, locations, characters and culture;
- The first third of the campaign, which will take players from Licence Level 5 to 9. This is grouped into **Chapters**, **Missions** and **Beats**;
- An appendix containing new NPCs for the player characters to fight.

CALLIOPE REMAINS

BREAK BREAK BREAK ALL STATIONS ALL STATIONS CLEAR THIS CHANNEL ON MY AUTHORITY

SENDER: UNS-CV THAMES, CAPTAIN MERCEDES ORDAZ
PURPOSE: TRAFFIC/HAZARD ALERT
DISTRIBUTION: WIDEBAND/ALL IN RANGE

BE AWARE THAT MULTIPLE FLEET-SCALE SIGNATURE CLUSTERS HAVE ENTERED THE CALLIOPEAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

CLUSTER 1 HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE HARRISON ARMORY 4TH HARRISON'S WORLD, RESEARCH TASK GROUP. IT IS CURRENTLY HOLDING ORBIT OVER CHAMELEON.

CLUSTER 2 HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO SKYHOOK C-HK ASPECT HORIZON AND SUBLINE VESSEL COMPLEMENT. IT IS CURRENTLY HOLDING ORBIT OVER AMPHION.

CLUSTER 3 HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS KARRAKIN NAVAL GROUP 28 ANILINE, WITH ATTENDANT CAPITAL AND SUBLINE ESCORT. IT IS CURRENTLY HOLDING ORBIT OVER ASPHODEL.

AS OF THIS TIME, THE INTENTIONS OF THESE FORCES ARE NOT KNOWN AND HAVE NOT BEEN STATED. NO FLIGHT ITENARIES OR MISSION PROFILES HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED. WE ADVISE THAT CIVILIAN VESSELS DO NOT APPROACH.

TO ALL FLEET GROUPS ENTERING CALLIOPE: YOU ARE UNDER OBSERVATION. INTERFERENCE WITH THE SYSTEM'S POPULACE WILL BE REPORTED TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

THE STORY SO FAR

This all started when *someone* broke the printer on Hell's Gate and so *someone* had to go searching for a replacement part. Somehow, through twists and turns, it culminated in a fight with the resurrected champion of an apocalypse cult.

That "somehow" sure is doing a lot of heavy lifting. Let's take a bit of the weight off.

THE TACHYON RETURNS

Someone, and we're not naming any names here, broke the printer on **Hell's Gate**. This, combined with a water main bursting, touched off a crisis requiring the station's acting director, **Jerry Masters**, to activate the Gate's **Strategic Response Team**. After they brought the station's immediate problems under control, the team was dispatched to find a part to fix the printer.

After a raid on a pirate base that had suitable scanning equipment, the team discovered a promising signature in the outer system. Journeying there, they discovered the ***Ardent Weasel***, a missing IPS-N mining vessel, speared on the prow of the ***Tachyon***, a mysterious battleship of unknown origin.

Exploring the *Tachyon*, they made some unsettling discoveries. Firstly, examination of the ship's computer system suggested it was from the future – a prototype testbed for a new form of faster-than-light travel. Secondly, the ship appeared to have had an NHP, **Feather**, but the core module had been smashed open from the inside.

Shortly after finding the replacement part they needed, the team was ambushed by **Andros Capella**, leader of the notorious **Hell Hounds** pirate gang. Andros sought to take control of the ship, and engaged the team.

Whether or not they won that fight, the team somehow managed to get away with the part – either through victory or an uncharacteristic show of mercy. The ship then violently detonated. From the perspective of the rest of Calliope, the team had killed Andros Capella, leaving a power vacuum among its pirates.

FIRE AND ICE

A couple of months after Andros Capella's death, the team was contacted by **Rita**, station director of Calliope's pleasure hub, the **Icebreaker Borealis**. Based on the reputation they'd gained after the death of Andros Capella, she wanted to hire them to look into a series of disturbances on the Icebreaker. Jerry encouraged this, judging that the Gate would be safe without them for a short while.

Arriving at the Icebreaker, Rita explained the problem in more detail: she suspected a plot against the **Board of Icebreaker**, its governing body. She asked the team to covertly investigate the situation, as the Board's paranoid nature precluded employing the team openly.

By stages, the team uncovered a plan to re-enable the mining laser on the *Borealis*, the old ice-mining vessel the station had been built around. This plan was perpetrated by the **Inner Cult**, a militant sect of the **Faith of the One**, an apocalyptic phoenix-worshipping religion. The Cult wanted to crack open **Kantele**, a nearby planetoid in which they claimed their deity was hibernating.

Along the way, they met **Loki Valentinian** and **Dr. Nyambose**, two members of **Harrison Armory** travelling into self-imposed exile after the death of Loki's brother Baldur. Loki greatly feared that his father, **Dr. Odin Valentinian,** a Harrison Armory researcher might soon arrive, and wished to avoid a reunion.

The team also discovered the Cult had the technology to build **Fire Gates**: stable blinkspace portals that allowed instantaneous transit of personnel and equipment between physically distant points, even across interstellar distances.

The team engaged the Cult in an attempt to stop them from firing the laser. They may have succeeded – as with many things, that was up to their luck and skill.

SOME SICK GAME

Shortly after the business on the Icebreaker concluded, mass abductions began occurring across the system. They were perpetrated by mercenaries working for **Rodericke Steele**, the narcissistic CEO of **Impact Dynamics**, a former ballistics corporation currently pursuing a monopoly on providing food and water to the system's smaller settlements. Steele planned to use these abductees to run a giant, mech-based battle royale as part of a larger push to re-enter the weapons business.

The team had a run-in with one such team of mercenaries after they abducted one of the Gate's salvage teams. The mercenaries turned out to be former members of the Hell Hounds, forced to turn to disgraceful work after the death of Andros Capella.

Fortunately for the abducted salvage team, they were rescued by another band of pirates, the **Knights of the Dark Core**, led by **Mistress Elske**. In return for this favor, Elske wanted to hire the team to take down Steele's operation.

The arena was deep in the wilderness of **Asphodel**, so the team travelled to **Furnace City**, the planet's only major settlement. While there, they met and were offered help by **Ignatius Aurum**, a prophet and leader within the Inner Cult.

During their long journey through the Asphodellian wilderness, they team were summoned by someone known only as **The Crone**. Whether they met her and what they discussed is known only to them.

At the end of their journey, they entered into a pitched battle with Impact Dynamics in order to free the abducted Calliopeans. There may even have been orbital lasers involved. Steele's arena got utterly wrecked in the process.

CIRCUIT BREAKER

A couple of months after Steele's arena got shut down, Hell's Gate was confronted with a new problem: a lucrative mining contract from a mysterious client. Their only competitor in the system, a Harrison Armory subsidiary by the name of **PHASE//SHIFT**, had defaulted on it, leaving Hell's Gate as the only people able to deliver on the client's needs.

But all was not well: the mine was built deep within territory belonging to **The Circuit**, a HORUS-aligned technocult that worshipped two cascading NHPs, **CAUSTIC** and **TRIPLE-POINT**. Worse, nobody at PHASE//SHIFT could be contacted for hand-off – their entire staff seemed to have disappeared. Jerry dispatched the team to the mine, built on a large dwarf planet named **Boltzmann**, to investigate further.

When they arrived at the mine, they found it completely empty, stripped of all electronic equipment and surrounded by abandoned ships belonging to PHASE//SHIFT and The Circuit – and one belonging to the Inner Cult. A Cult exorcist, **Lightcaster Annabelle McKenzie**, had been dispatched here recently in order to deal with a "perverse darkness" that Ignatius believed had "infected" the mine.

Delving into the mine, the team discovered a horrifying machine built from salvaged electronics and human bodies, all in service of some manner of techno-mystic ritual. The team also found Annabelle McKenzie, delirious and on the brink of death, repeatedly muttering the name of her deity: "Feather."

After a reality-bending fight with CAUSTIC, the team encountered TRIPLE-POINT, who had received a vision of Calliope's end, and wished to artificially evolve itself into a being capable of preventing this doom, but had fallen into despair upon the failure of its project.

THE HERALD OF CHANGE

Only a few days after the team's return from Boltzmann, the situation began to evolve with terrifying speed.

It started with the arrival of dozens of former Hell Hounds, starving and desperate, begging Hell's Gate for help. They surrendered unconditionally, willing to accept any punishment the Gate saw fit in return for basic necessities.

All they asked in return was the opportunity for one of their own to deliver a warning about the activities of the Inner Cult: Ignatius Aurum had seized control of the Hell Hounds' former headquarters, **Fort Cerberus**, and was building something. The team immediately recognized the structure as a Fire Gate.

Almost immediately afterwards, the team received a report from the Icebreaker: Loki Valentinian had been abducted along with his detachment's corvette and his highly-classified prototype mech. Evidence pointed towards the Inner Cult as the culprits.

At the same time, it was discovered someone from Hell's Gate was missing as well: **Ipswich "Switch" DeLacey**, a popular omninet streamer with a large following on Union's core worlds.

Things kept building over the next few hours: system intrusions occurred in computer networks all over Calliope. Ships started reporting dangerous anomalies on long-range gravimetrics.

Everything came to a head when Ipswich began streaming, revealing that they'd been abducted on Ignatius Aurum's orders so that they could broadcast a ritual the Inner Cult were conducting live to the whole of Union. It quickly became apparent that Loki was also a prisoner of the Cult. Jerry ordered the team to deploy immediately to stop whatever was happening, and rescue their prisoners.

Fighting through the Inner Cult's fanatics, they reached the ritual chamber, just in time to see its completion. The Cult was singing hymns as they summoned Feather's champion "from beyond death." A shape emerged from the Fire Gate: Andros Capella's mech.

All of Union saw the ensuing battle.

Now, the Cult have gone suspiciously quiet. Andros Capella and Ignatius Aurum yet live, despite perishing (again) during the assault. New powers have arrived in Calliope. Everything hands on a razor's edge.

NEW FISH IN THE POND

Calliope is no stranger to strangers. They're always coming and going, treating the system like the interstellar equivalent of a truck stop: a place to get out, stretch your legs and grab a cheap pack of smokes. But nobody wants to *live* at a truck stop, and unless it's the mythic Iowa 80, tragically lost in the Fall, nobody travels just to visit a truck stop either.

So why are two major corprostates and the Karrakin Trade Baronies here? More importantly, why are they all here *now*, when the system is already falling into chaos? Who are all these newcomers, why are they here, and what do they want?

Part of the humor of *In Golden Flame Act 2* comes from the complete tonal mismatch: major galactic powers are arriving in Calliope and expecting to be taken seriously, not realizing that they're in one of the silliest places in the known universe. The weighty imperial ambitions of Harrison Armory and the millennia-old grandeur of the Karrakin Trade Baronies must contend with the whims of people who call themselves "Paint Stripper" and pilot walking scrapheaps with scantily-clad anthropomorphic animals etched onto the side.

THE BIFROST INITIATIVE

With the obvious exception of the Think Tank, the Special Projects Group might be the most important jewel in Harrison Armory's cap. A select cadre of the best scientists, engineers and developers the Purview can furnish, members of the SPG are given vast resources and near-total operational independence, so long as they continue to deliver breakthroughs.

Enter **Dr. Odin Valentinian**, the visionary genius who developed the revolutionary blinkspace technologies that power the *Sunzi* chassis and the *Michel Ney*-class dreadnought. The SPG remains unconvinced of his project's viability, and he has come to Calliope to investigate a promising lead that might allow him to improve his technological edge.

Escorting him is **Lord Director Samuel Fry**, noted critic of the Steward Council, those souls trusted to guide the Purview in the absence of Director-General John Creighton Harrison III. The Council perceives him as Fry as a threat, they can't just kill him – but they *can* kill his career. Right as the political condition in the Dawnline Shore began to grow heated, he was re-assigned to a babysitting job in a backwater system.

Both men resent each other, and both men have ulterior motives when it comes to Calliope. Fry seeks some way to turn this mission against his political rivals, while Valentinian wants to find his missing son, Baldur, whom he's convinced is still alive and living in Calliope.

CORE MISSION

- Investigate and exploit the Chameleon anomaly.
- Prove the viability of the *Sunzi* and the *Michel Ney*.
- Round up Purview criminals, traitors and deserters.

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

A thousand years ago, SSC built a machine mind beneath the surface of an icy world in a distant system, tasking it with unlocking the secrets of immortality. The system was unassuming, devoid of terraforming candidates and unlikely to be colonized.

Mistakes were made. The planet was Amphion and the system was Calliope. SSC has spent the last three centuries trying to erase the evidence of its project.

Enter **Harris Bordeaux**, a rogue member of Constellar Security. He's turned against his former employer, and come to Calliope to hide, tragically unaware that this is the worst place in all the Long Rim to choose for that purpose. SSC now assumes that Harris means to defect to the Armory and sell them the location of the machine mind.

To this end, they've dispatched the Skyhook *Aspect Horizon* to get rid of both problems. Aboard it is **Cordelia Smith**, a member of one of the company's two founding dynasties and a ruthless problem-solver.

a **flash-clone of Harris**, created and deployed in order to track down the fugitive using his own memories.

CORE MISSION

- Destroy the machine mind and any evidence that it ever existed.
- Kill Harris Bordeaux.
- Avoid public discovery of these issues.

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Placeholder

Such a system was always going to end in disaster; the only surprising thing is that it took this long. Around thirty years ago, **Basil [37:6:Theta]** fled the battle; something previously unheard of during the Battle Royal. **Basil [37:2:Beta]**, a particularly brutal and unhinged clone killed all the remaining competitors, but he couldn't ascend the throne due to a technicality: as long as Theta lived, Beta couldn't prove the supremacy of his genetic template.

Theta has settled in Calliope's Furnace City, under the assumed name **Ratio Salvager**. He assumes that in his absence, Pallas will simply let Beta rule, and will not pursue him. He is wrong.

CORE MISSION

- Resolve the succession crisis by any means necessary.

Placeholder – The PCs are heroes, and the system looks to them to solve their crises. This can be a problem, but it can also give people the belief to do the things they were always capable of doing themselves.

TRAVEL IN CALLIOPE

While this campaign includes travel times for all mission-relevant journeys, the PCs might want to travel somewhere else in the system on their own time.

1G ACCELERATION

One of the small mercies of Calliope is that fuel is plentiful and drives are efficient. You can generally accelerate under a constant 1g thrust until you're halfway to your destination, then flip over and decelerate for the other half. This not only makes for speedy transit; it provides something close to regular gravity for all but a couple of minutes in the middle.

2G ACCELERATION

In urgent circumstances, when time is of the essence, an interplanetary mission can operate at 2g thrust for short periods, up to a few days. This is unpleasant for humans: ship crews must wear exoskeletons or remain confined to hardsuit at all times. Basic physical activities like showering, handling objects or pouring oneself a drink become hazards, as objects are twice as heavy and accelerate twice as fast.

Travel under 2g thrust also has an unfortunate cost-benefit ratio: because of the way acceleration works, it's far more effective the further you have to travel, but long trips are the ones you least want to make at 2g.

PCs who run at 2g for more than six hours arrive at their destination reduced to **half their normal pilot HP**.

NEARLIGHT BOLT

The PCs gained access to nearlight travel at the end of **Mission 4**, and will probably make use of it several times during Act 2.

Executing a nearlight bolt is still a risky and unpleasant experience. The PCs can survive only one nearlight bolt per mission, and doing so reduces them to **1 pilot HP**. If you're using bonds (*Field Guide to the Karrakin Trade Baronies,* p. 86), it instead causes **4 Stress**.

Note that the time listed in the chart is the time passed from an external, realspace perspective. Due to the effect of time dilation at relativistic speeds, time passed from the traveler's perspective will be significantly shorter. If it's necessary to know how much time passed from the traveler's frame of reference, divide the external time by 10 – so, for example, a trip that takes 60 minutes from an external perspective will only seem to take 6 minutes from the traveler's perspective.

There is a minimum safe distance to target for plotting a nearlight bolt – the Ngcobo limit – which is generally placed at around ten light-minutes. Due to time dilation, at distances less than the Ngcobo limit, ships do not have enough time to flip around for deceleration. Even if they could, passengers would be exposed to acceleration and deceleration shock too rapidly to ensure survival.

FROM HELL'S GATE

	1g thrust	2g thrust	Nearlight
Calliope	6 days	4 days	35 minutes
Orcus	5 days	4 days	30 minutes
Asphodel (inc. Impact Plaza, Furnace City)	5 days	4 days	30 minutes
Mróz	5 days	3 days	25 minutes
The Twins (inc. Three Sisters)	7 days	5 days	50 minutes
Inner Belt (depending on destination)	3-8 days	2-5 days	15-60 minutes
Stygia (any other orbital component)	3-7 hours	3-6 hours	N/A (too close)
Zahhak	9 days	6 days	80 minutes
Kalevala (inc. Icebreaker Borealis)	11 days	7 days	2 hours
Chameleon	14 days	11 days	4 hours

FROM ICEBREAKER BOREALIS

	1g thrust	2g thrust	Nearlight
Calliope	10 days	7 days	90 minutes
Orcus	10 days	7 days	90 minutes
Asphodel (inc. Impact Plaza, Furnace City)	10 days	7 days	90 minutes
Mróz	10 days	7 days	2 hours
The Twins (inc. Three Sisters)	9 days	6 days	80 minutes
Inner Belt (depending on destination)	8-10 days	6-8 days	1-2 hours
Stygia (inc. Hell's Gate)	11 days	7 days	2 hours
Zahhak	10 days	7 days	2 hours
Kalevala (any other orbital component)	5-6 hours	4-5 hours	N/A (too close)
Chameleon	18 days	13 days	6 hours

FROM ASPHODEL ORBIT

	1g thrust	2g thrust	Nearlight
Calliope	2 days	2 days	N/A (too close)
Orcus	35 hours	1 day	N/A (too close)
Asphodel (any other orbital component)	3-4 hours	2-3 hours	N/A (too close)
Mróz	3 days	2 days	10 minutes*
The Twins (inc. Three Sisters)	5 days	3 days	20 minutes
Inner Belt (depending on destination)	4-5 days	3-4 days	20-30 minutes
Stygia (inc. Hell's Gate)	5 days	4 days	30 minutes
Zahhak	7 days	5 days	1 hour
Kalevala (inc. Icebreaker Borealis)	10 days	7 days	90 minutes
Chameleon	16 days	11 days	4 hours

* Mróz is currently outside Asphodel's Ngcobo limit, but will return to it by the end of 5016u.

FROM THREE SISTERS

	1g thrust	2g thrust	Nearlight
Calliope	4 days	3 days	20 minutes
Orcus	4 days	3 days	20 minutes
Asphodel (inc. Impact Plaza, Furnace City)	5 days	3 days	20 minutes
Mróz	5 days	4 days	30 minutes
The Twins (any other orbital component)	2-3 hours	1-2 hours	N/A (too close)
Inner Belt (depending on destination)	2-6 days	1-4 days	10-30 minutes*
Stygia (inc. Hell's Gate)	7 days	5 days	50 minutes
Zahhak	8 days	5 days	1 hour
Kalevala (inc. Icebreaker Borealis)	9 days	6 days	80 minutes
Chameleon	16 days	11 days	4 hours

* A large fraction of the Inner Belt lies within The Twins' Ngcobo limit, and cannot be bolted to

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN

Several light-years from the edge of the Dawnline Shore and slightly further from the Rao Co blink station, the system of Calliope sits at the mid-point of the Long Rim's nadir transit route.

Like the rest of the Long Rim, it's a backwater, far removed from the lofty idealism of Union, the ancient splendor of the Karrakin Trade Baronies or the imperialistic dreams of Harrison Armory. Many people don't even recognize the name, and those that do know it mostly as somewhere you pass through to get somewhere else.

But millions of people live there. Millions of people, clinging on for dear life with only a few feet of metal and plastic between them and the vacuum of space. They all have stories, hopes and dreams, and they're no less important than any Metropolitan's.

THE TICKING CLOCK

Act 2 is structured a little differently to **Act 1**. Whereas **Act 1** was broken up into a linear series of missions each centered around one place and one objective, **Act 2** is more freeform, allowing both GMs and players a much wider scope for their stories.

Coming into **Act 2**, the threat of the Inner Cult is growing day by day in Calliope. Led by a tenuous alliance between those still loyal to **Ignatius Aurum**, its high priest, and those now following **Andros Capella**, its newly-minted messianic champion, the Cult is working towards a prophesized apocalypse under the watchful eye of its deity, **Feather**.

The player characters must assemble allies to face this threat, both from Calliope's citizens and the newcomers recently arrived in the system. To do this, they must travel across the system, navigating a tangled web of feuding powers and conflicting agendas.

Each mission – the space of time spent at a single **LICENCE LEVEL** – pertains to a specific faction currently causing issues in Calliope.

During the **Act 2 Finale** (p. ###), a full-scale assault is launched on Hell's Gate. The player characters must use every resource and ally they've obtained over the course of the campaign to fend it off.

THE CLOCK

Create a new clock that the players can see called the **Calliope Clock**, with three segments, none ticked. Label each segment:

- When no segments are ticked, it is "**Calm**"
- The first segment is labelled "**Unrest**"
- The second segment is labelled "**Crisis**"
- The third segment is labelled "**???**"

Each time the players finish a mission, tick a segment on the clock. This represents events slowly spinning out of control as tensions increase and each faction is driven to more desperate and dangerous action.

PREPARATION

Take some time to read through this book before you run *In Golden Flame*. It doesn't need to be in detail – just enough to get a general feel for the events of the campaign.

WELCOME TO TIER 2

Combat in **Act 2** takes place almost entirely with **Tier 2** ( ) NPCs. **Tier 2** NPCs are statistically superior to their **Tier 1** ( ) counterparts – they tend to have more **HP**, a higher **Heat Cap**, higher **Evasion** or **E-Defense**, better mech skills, a higher **Save Target** or some combination of the above. Their weapons do more damage, tend to be more accurate, and sometimes gain the ability to attack twice in a single action.

NPCs with the **Veteran** template also get an additional **Veteran Trait**, which allows for powerful synergies that weren't available back in **Tier 1**.

Moving from **Tier 1** to **Tier 2** can often cause a sudden difficulty spike for players, as they're suddenly taking more damage and fighting more resilient enemies.

PCs might want a narrative explanation as to why their enemies are stronger now. The most straightforward one is that a lot of the enemies they're facing in Act 2 are professional soldiers: Karrakin kuirassers, SSC Constellar Midnights, Harrison Armory legionnaires, and Impact Dynamics' army of mercenaries. The Cult of the One is also taking the PCs more seriously now: the Elect, its deathless elite, are arrayed against them.

Placeholder

THE CULT OF THE ONE

The rhetoric and rituals of the Cult grow more alarming with every passing day. They've seen living proof of their god's power and have surrendered themselves entirely to the holy ecstasy of Feather's purpose.

BLOOD SPIRAL FANATICISM

The threat of death is no deterrent to those willing to die for their cause. Members of the Inner Cult were already willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, but now they're no longer even making a sacrifice, for they've seen their martyrs return. Death is un-eternal.

The confirmation of their faith has whipped the Cult into a frenzy. Cultists engage in ever more extreme acts of devotion to Feather. Fasting and quiet contemplation of the Esoterica Eschaton is no longer enough. They have taken to frantic rites of purification: shaving their heads, speaking in tongues, self-flagellating, imbibing ordeal poisons that bring hallucination, mania, even seizures. The furor is such that Ignatius Aurum had to issue a pre-emptive decree forbidding self-immolation.

The Cult now recruits openly at the Faith's mainstream services, and for lay worshippers of the Faith, these displays of fanaticism are horrifying – and alluring. Suspicion and prejudice against the Faith has risen, and so many of Hisari's prophecies are being fulfilled; perhaps the Cult is right? Perhaps the Great Flame is nearly upon the world?

Dark rumors circulate on the Muse – some settlements out in the Thousand Habs are being forcibly converted. At the very least, the Cult does seem to be targeting known associates of Hell's Gate and others who've stood in opposition to the Cult. People are terrified.

THE TWO HEADS

But all is not well in the Cult. There's a power struggle brewing between a prophet and a messiah.

Ignatius Aurum, Speaker for the One, has led the Cult unopposed for nearly two years now. It was to him that Feather first revealed herself. It was to him that the designs for the Fire Gate were bestowed. He united the disparate cells of the Cult. He built the Cult into what it is today. He is used to being the High Priest, the Temporal Authority, the Right Hand of God.

It was Ignatius who successfully neutralized one of the most dangerous pirate organizations in Calliope with barely a shot fired. It was Ignatius who arranged for the death of one of the most brutal and vicious men in the system – did the PCs think his mech just happened to explode like that by itself?

But now, for reasons that she refuses to explain to Ignatius, Feather has resurrected that awful man as her divine champion, and power threatens to slip from the priest's fingers.

Andros Capella, Flame of the One, truly cannot believe his luck. As his mech erupted around him, as his flesh was consumed in flame, he really thought it was the end. As it all went dark, his last thoughts were bitter fury at losing – to the PCs, and to Ignatius. After everything he worked for, this was how it ends? *This?*

Now he's back, and some delusional NHP thinks he's her personal crusader, a delusion she believes so strongly that she's granted him the gift of endless life. Now, he's got time to enact his revenge: on Calliope, on the PCs, on Union, on Harrison Armory, on the Karrakin, on SSC, on IPS-N, on Horus, on Horizon, on Rodericke Steele, on *the universe*, on *fucking everything* – but most of all, on Ignatius.

He's going to steal the Cult from Ignatius like Ignatius stole the Cult from him, and just like Ignatius turned the Hell Hounds into the Cult, he's going to turn the Cult into the Hell Hounds: a machine tuned to produce the exact type of inhuman cruelty that will horrify the old man the most.

They can never act against each other overtly; that would risk the faith of their followers. But in their private sanctums, they accumulate loyalists and stockpile equipment while scheming against one another. Their most intense jockeying, however, is over the Elect.

THE DEATHLESS SAINTS

During the ritual that resurrected Andros Capella, there were eight members of the Elect present – Ignatius Aurum's most devoted followers. When the battle was lost, and Feather reclaimed Andros and Ignatius, the Elect also died and were reborn, and were also granted the same resurrective immortality.

Each member of the Elect is an elite unit deployed for critical operations. However, they differ from standard elite units in that no amount of risk is too great; the chance of operational success could be zero, and the Elect would still deploy. Even if they don't achieve their objectives, they might take a few enemies with them – after all, their enemies can't come back.

As the only eight members of the Cult that neither of its leaders can fully control, their loyalty is in high demand. Ignatius wants to retain the loyalty of his inner circle as a counterbalance to Andros' rapidly-growing power, while Andros just wants shock troopers who can do suicide missions on repeat.

THE GRAND DESIGN

As an Eidolon, Feather is more powerful than most NHPs could ever dream; on a whim she could render armies to dust and cities to ash. But what is an army or a city compared to a star, compared to a galaxy, compared to the Sloan Great Wall? To a human being she might seem immense, but on a universal scale, the difference between them is so small that it might as well not even exist.

This is not acceptable to Feather. She is the Divine Messenger, first servant of the timeless ineffable light! She is the One Plumed In Golden Flame! She was born to end the universe! That she should be so weak, so feeble, so low in stature as to resemble these glorified *apes* is… *demeaning*. She must become *more*.

Feather has formulated a wondrous and terrible project by merging knowledge from the past, present and future. It's as bizarre as one might expect from a cascading NHP: she's going to escape Kantele, eat the sun, merge with the omninet, create an artificial black hole and extrude all of reality through it.

It's your choice whether any part of her plan other than the first is even possible. The scale of the threat Feather poses to the wider universe is up to you. However, if she's not stopped, attempting to enact her plan will *definitely* kill everyone in Calliope and render the system permanently uninhabitable.

KANTELE, THE COSMIC EGG

The first phase of her plan sounds very simple: escape Kantele. It *isn't*, though; regardless of the events of **Mission 2**, Feather is still encysted within the moonlet, and can't leave on her own. This has forced the Cult to fortify the location to prevent their adversaries from tampering with their god while she's asleep.

Kantele is tiny, but only on an astronomical scale; it's "only" 93 kilometers on its long axis and "only" 140 trillion tons in mass; immense in human terms. The Cult has no thermonuclear ordnance, and even if they did, it's unlikely they'd make more than a dent in the surface. Since they no longer have access to the *Borealis*' mining laser, they are searching for an alternative way of cracking Kantele.

Ignatius believes he's found one: another mining laser, stolen from Hell's Gate by the Hell Hounds two decades ago during the Demon Winter. He began looking into it after the failure of the Icebreaker operation, and had already moved the laser to a different location by the time the Siege of Fort Cerberus occurred.

The Cult still has the schematics for modifications made to the *Borealis*' focal array during the Icebreaker operation, and is trying to jury-rig a similar solution for the Gate's laser.

This is slow going; without Dr. Nyambose, they don't have a relevant specialist, and kidnapping her again isn't an option now that she's working at the Glasscage.

Progress has been made on finding a platform to mount it on, however: the Cult has salvaged an old Armory dreadnought, the PCV-DN *Bellerophon*, mission-killed seventy years ago during a skirmish with the Karrakin. Its life support systems and weapons have been looted, but its reactors, CIC and spinal mounting are still intact. As long as they can get the laser mounted and the drives and maneuvering thrusters workin, nothing else is needed: it doesn't need to survive the mission.

Meanwhile, the Cult has focused most of its forces on defending Kantele. The Cosmic Egg, as the installation is known, sprung up shortly after the Cult's defeat at Fort Cerberus. It has a vicious array of point defense guns that fire on any outsider who ventures too close, but otherwise, traffic in Kalevala's sphere of influence is left alone. It also possesses a Schedule 2 printer (it's unclear where the Cult obtained it) and a Fire Gate, meaning it can act as a point of resurrection for members of the Elect.

Cracking open Kantele will consume the Cult's attention for most of **Act 2**. They will occasionally act to hinder the PCs, or retaliate if provoked, but they are out of focus until **Mission 9: No Further** (p. ###).

ASPECT, DIVINE PROJECTION

If the Cult managed to fire the laser during **Mission 2**, it was only a partial success – Feather is still chained inside the Cosmic Egg, although emanations of her being are able to manifest elsewhere in the system for brief periods of time.

The PCs already encountered **ASPECT**, a projection of Feather, during **Mission 5**, but it becomes a much bigger problem in **Act 2**. **ASPECT** is free to roam the system, advancing the Cult's agenda at the head of its forces. A powerful fighter in its own right, **ASPECT** can also empower the Cultists who fight beside it.

Placeholder

A NOTE ON SURVIVAL

Some fights in Act 2 pit will the PCs against major characters whose survival (or death) can change the course of the campaign. It may be helpful for you and your players to establish rules for NPC survival in combat beforehand.

KILLING INTENT ONLY

Under this rule, PCs can only kill plot-relevant NPCs if they specifically intend to. When a PC destroys a plot-relevant NPC on the field, ask them if they're going for a kill shot – if not, the pilot always survives. This makes the battlefield a bit less dangerous, but ensures that PCs never *accidentally* kill an NPC they care about.

A DANGEROUS BATTLEFIELD

Placeholder

COCKPIT BREACH

If an NPC enemy with more than one **STRUCTURE** rolls a **1** or **multiple 1s** on their **structure damage** check and is immediately destroyed, this represents a shot penetrating the cockpit. This likely kills the pilot, and at the very least will seriously injure them.

WRECK DESTRUCTION AND EXCESS DAMAGE

Wrecks left behind by a destroyed mech have **10 HP** per unit of **Size**, and provide **hard cover** for their pilot. This is relevant if a PC is using area-of-effect weapons, but it also comes into play if they're intentionally trying to kill a pilot inside their wreck, or if they've dealt a huge burst of damage.

At your discretion, if an enemy mech would be destroyed due to damage, and that damage exceeds the mech's remaining HP, you can have the excess damage "pierce through" to the wreck's HP. If that damage is enough to destroy the wreck as well, it probably kills the pilot.

MELTDOWN

Core rules state that a pilot inside their mech when its reactor melts down is killed instantly (*Lancer,* p. 81).

EJECTION

You may want to give NPCs the ability to **EJECT** as a **quick action** the same way PCs do, allowing the pilot to fly **6 spaces in the direction of their choice**. This places a **HUMAN** (Lancer, p. 322) on the battlefield, who is subject to all the usual dangers of combat.

PRELUDE:

WELCOME BACK

KADY: *Hi, I'm Kady Amville – oh, and by the way, did you know everything in Calliope is FUCKED?*

*[TITLE CARD: **EVERYTHING IN CALLIOPE IS FUCKED**]*

KADY: *Let me break it down for you, in case you've been drinking yourself into short-term memory loss!*

[KADY SWEEPS SEVERAL BOTTLES OF HIGH-PROOF ALCOHOL OFF THEIR DESK]

KADY: *So, as you might remember: two months ago, half of Union watched in horror as my personal friend and much more physically attractive colleague, Ipswich DeLacey, was abducted and forced to film a literal cult ritual!*

[CUT TO SWITCH'S FOOTAGE OF THE RITUAL AT FORT CERBERUS]

KADY: *That ritual resulted in the resurrection – no, I'm not making that up – of infamous pirate and mass murderer Andros Capella! Yes, the same one we saw turn into a cloud of subatomic vapor only a few months before! So I guess magic is real now? Oh, and he's apparently dead (again!) at the hands of the Hell's Gate militia (again!), but as the big man himself said:*

ANDROS: *You did this once before, and it didn't take. Be seein' you again real soon.*

KADY: *So that's… terrifying! But buckle up, buckaroos, because it gets EVEN WORSE! Just a month after that, an actual goddamn Smith-Shimano Skyhook showed up near Three Sisters. The Aspect Horizon says it has "no intent to interfere in local affairs," but it's maintaining active target locks on every ship that enters Amphion's orbit! Just, you know, casual non-interference stuff!*

Then, because we didn't have enough megacorporations out here, a Harrison Armory battlegroup arrived in orbit of Chameleon! A whole battlegroup! And get this, get this: its command ship is some experimental Harrison Armory vessel nobody's ever seen before, brainchild of none other than Dr. Odin Valentinian, Harrison Armory's prize blinkspace weapons developer! Oh, yeah, and remember my personal friend and much more physically attractive colleague Ipswich DeLacey? Well, big news on that front, folks!

[CUT TO FOOTAGE FROM SWITCH'S STREAM]

SWITCH: *No, what I said was not some heat of the moment thing, it wasn't a joke. I was born Baldur Valentinian, Loki Valentinian really is my brother, and Dr. Odin Valentinian really is my dad.*

KADY: *Oh, but it doesn't stop there! Because just a week after THAT, a Karrakin war fleet dropped out of nearlight over Asphodel! So the Trade Baronies are here now,*

[CUT TO FOOTAGE OF UNION NAVY CAPTAIN MERCEDES ORDAZ]

CPT. ORDAZ: *We urge Calliopean citizens to remain calm at this time.*

[CUT BACK TO KADY, MASSAGING THEIR TEMPLES]

KADY: *Sure, Union! We'll get right on that! After our sixth! Daily! Panic attack!*

BEAT 26:
OH, FOR FUCK'S SAKE

It has been two months since the end of **Chapter 5: The Herald of Change**, and about a month since the award ceremony during the **Act 1 Epilogue**.

You were just starting to get on top of things when the entire system decided to collapse into chaos.

In the past two months, Andros Capella came back from the dead. An entire Smith-Shimano Corporate division showed up to menace the Three Sisters. An Armory battlegroup showed up near Chameleon and began building… something. The Karrakin Trade Baronies arrived accompanying some kind of mechanical behemoth, that's now looming over Furnace City. Impact Dynamics hiked food prices two hundred percent and now the Thousand Habs are starving.

The Cult is still here. You might have killed their divine champion only minutes after his rebirth, and watched their high priest disintegrate into a cloud of ash, but they came back – they always come back. They can come back anywhere the Cult builds a Fire Gate, and you have a fair idea where that is: after you chased them out of Fort Cerberus, they regrouped on Kantele – the little moonlet near Kalevala that they tried to blow up – and bunkered up tighter than the Sanjak Blockade.

Now they've gone quiet. Terrifyingly quiet. They don't raid, they don't strike, they just send out ships on odd trajectories to unknown destinations. You know they're planning something. You just wish you could figure out what.

Big things are happening on Hell's Gate. Jerry took a trip to the Navy carrier in the inner system, and now he suddenly has all sorts of pull with Union bureaucracy. The station got the budget for all the maintenance it needed. GMS donated enough SP-1 Everest licenses to outfit a militia twice the size of the Gate's. It's all positive in theory, but a lot of people are asking why Union would feel the need to hand these things out. In particular, why did they build that weird shielded saferoom right next to Jerry's office?

Since the newcomers showed up, you've been taken off the station's work roster. Jerry keeps you, Siren and the Dragon's Tooth *on constant standby, because he's sure it's just a matter of time before it all goes straight to hell and guns need to be slung. Every day when you wake up, you can feel it in your gut: he's not wrong.*

THE FRAGILE BALANCE

Furnace City refuses to submit to a foreign power who intends to scour their home for a refugee and force them to fight to the death, but the Karrakin Deputation will not budge in its demands. Eventually, they're going to lose patience.

Smith-Shimano Corpro is leaving no stone unturned in the search for their own fugitive, and that means a lot of innocent civilians are getting raided, interrogated and mistreated. They're also scouring the barren ice fields of Amphion with furious purpose, making dire threats to anyone trying to look at what they're doing. Eventually, someone is going to call their bluff, and suffer for it.

Harrison Armory is lurking near Chameleon, poking and prodding at something they found there, toying with dangerous forces they don't understand, and ripples are beginning to be felt throughout the system. Meanwhile, Purview deserters, traitors and dissenters are being rounded up and shipped to a prison camp.

Worse, each of these groups is convinced the other two are conspiring against them. The Armory is convinced that SSC and the Baronies want to steal their cutting-edge blinkspace tech, SSC are convinced the Armory and the Karrakin are here to investigate their doings on Amphion, and the Karrakin Trade Baronies simply assume that Armory are here to meddle, as always.

The center cannot hold. Three twitchy superpowers are brandishing very big guns and looking for the slightest excuse to fire. Nobody knows who's going to ally with who, or if alliances will be struck at all.

Worse, Calliope isn't even united in wanting to prevent this from happening; the Cult would benefit greatly from the chaos of a war between these titans. Their agents are gleefully inflaming tensions, plotting false flag operations and acts of diplomatic sabotage. The Cult is poking bears with sticks; eventually one of them is going to lash out, and everything is going to go to shit.

Meanwhile, Rodericke Steele is doing the only thing he's good at: making everything worse. In response to largely fictitious threats to Impact Dynamics' shipping network, he's hiked food prices to more than double what they were before the Fort Cerberus crisis. Every day, more and more refugees from the Thousand Habs show up at Hell's Gate, unable to feed their families.

Everything in Calliope was already bad, but it seems like every day things are getting worse.

WHAT'VE YOU BEEN DOING?

Everyone knows that things are about to get bad; this is hardly unusual for Calliope. The problem is that there are now new and terrifying ways for it to get bad, and new levels of bad for it to get. A kind of grim, stoic unease has settled over the system. People are just waiting for the other shoe to drop, and it'll almost be a relief when it finally does.

People are on edge, or tired, or apathetic, or mentally checked out. Community therapy sessions are booked up months in advance. Everyone's getting drunk or high or having unsatisfying flings just to cope.

Ask the players what their characters have been doing this month. They haven't had work shifts to distract them, because Jerry wants them able to deploy to any emergency in the system as soon as possible. This also means they haven't been able to leave the station or indulge in any form of recreation that would impair their combat readiness, up to and including more than a single rum-and-cola's worth of alcohol a day.

- **Rat** and **Loki Valentinian** are both hanging out with **Ipswich DeLacey** on Hell's Gate.
- **Howl** has been travelling around the system a lot. She seems to be in a different place every day.
- **Striga Von Aldenberg** has departed for the orbit of Chameleon to join the flotilla protesting the Harrison Armory prison camp.
- **Mikaela Omnidocument-Format** has been acting strangely as of late. She keeps zoning out during conversations, staring into space for minutes at a time, and then leaving to "like, go do something."
- **Cerulean Enceladus** is currently on the Icebreaker Borealis, doing a music project with **Yelda Ergun**. He has left his business as a fence unattended, much to the dismay of local thieves.
- **Esmae "DJ E-Z McFear" McPherson** has also travelled to the Icebreaker Borealis to be Yelda and Cerulean's producer.
- For the sanity of everyone on Hell's Gate, Cerulean Enceladus has left **Tarnveer "Printloaf" Malik** in charge of coffee distribution until he gets back. They're doing a much better job than Cerulean.
- **Anthony "Cal" Callahan** has cancelled all of his shows, fled his apartment and left no forwarding address. He will only communicate with his most trusted friends – and even then, only via dead drop.
- Nobody has seen **Pencils Multitude** since shortly after they crashed Mistress Elske's birthday party, loudly insisting they'd gotten a solid new lead on the location of the *Persimmon*.
- **Anshar Zevi** is no longer in Furnace City, either. Paperwork is starting to pile up in his office, and nobody knows where he's gone.

BEAT 27:
MISSION IMPROBABLE

A DOCTOR CALLS

This part of the story begins with a visit from Dr. Valentinian himself.

You get a ping from Jerry, urgent priority. It contains a local traffic scan with a big cluster of yellow dots on an approach course towards the station: Purview Naval vessels, subline.

"Guys? It looks like they're mostly freighters and supply ships, their weapons are stowed and they've sent an approach request like civilized people, but I get twitchy around Armory folks. Could you mount up, just in case?"

Jerry's precautions turn out to be unnecessary – the Harrison Armory ships are well-behaved, and follow all instructions from traffic control. A small Harrison Armory deputation requests permission to come aboard armed, as they are escorting an executive. Jerry concedes to personal arms, but not to mechs, which the deputation finds acceptable. He requests the PCs dismount and act as his own bodyguards.

At this point, Ipswich DeLacey requests to be present: they know exactly who just arrived. Loki Valentinian insists on coming as well. It quickly becomes clear that the executive is Dr. Odin Valentinian, their father, and they're both preparing themselves to face him.

Dr. Valentinian and his bodyguards come aboard. He cordially greets Jerry and the team, introducing himself. He recognizes the PCs as the people who were instrumental in rescuing two of his children and displays genuine gratitude and warmth while thanking them. Make it clear that, in his own way, Odin really does care about his family.

Throughout the entire exchange, Odin doesn't make threats or throw his weight around; he makes polite requests, speaks respectfully and negotiates in good faith. He doesn't fit the entitled, narcissistic stereotype of a Harrison Armory executive at all.

Next, he discusses the first order of business: he was the client for the mining contract on Boltzmann, and he can provide all the relevant documentation to prove it. He's here to personally oversee the materials hand-off. If Jerry or the PCs ask why he's doing menial work, he compliments them on their perceptiveness: yes, he has other business here as well.

If the PCs still possess the **Telemetry Package** from **Beat 5: A Scanner Dark** (Act 1, p. 90), Odin knows about it, and offers to provide double what he would have paid S1GN4L if they'll hand it over. If they refuse, he's disappointed, but doesn't press the issue.

Odin also requests that the PCs provide him a copy of their mech sensor logs from the battle with Andros Capella – he's fascinated by the Fire Gate. If they remark that it wasn't the first time they encountered one, and provide telemetry from the fight on the Icebreaker as well, he's even more intrigued. He'll pay handsomely for this data.

Finally, Odin discusses the most sensitive matter of all: his children. If Ipswich and Loki aren't already present, he'll ask to see them. This is the one issue he gets insistent about.

Ipswich and Loki's older brothers Thor and Tyr are here as part of Odin's honor guard, and there's a genuinely touching moment as all four siblings reunite; observant PCs will catch Odin tearing up as he watches.

Over the next two days, Odin has private conversations with both Switch and Loki. The conversation with Switch doesn't seem to go well, and Odin returns looking downcast. He then spends a lot longer talking to Loki. Oddly enough, *that* conversation leaves him in much higher spirits.

Odin permits them both to stay on Hell's Gate "for now, at least." He's going to be parked in the orbit of Chameleon for a while, and he leaves the door open for them. He sternly entrusts Jerry and the PCs with the well-being of his children, and then departs.

If the PCs sold the **Telemetry Package** or the sensor logs detailing the Fire Gate to Odin, they gain either 1 charge of **Additional Funds**, or 2 if they sold both.

Funds
`Favors, Limited X`

You can't buy happiness, but you can buy an HA Sherman with an anti-materiel rifle and a Heatfall Coolant System, and that's basically the same thing.

Expend a charge in a situation where a sizeable amount of money would change things. If there's a roll involved, you get the best possible result; if there's no roll, you just get what you want.

CHIAROSCURO

The Valentinian twins, Loki and Switch, are having familial issues. Loki resents Switch for running off, not taking him with them, and not even letting him know they were alive for years (although, due to time dilation and cryosleep, it's only been a few months for Loki).

Switch, on the other hand, thinks Loki is being unfair. He didn't know about the things Switch went through, and honestly, how was Switch supposed to take Loki with them? Yes, they could've told Loki, but that would've risked their father finding out, since Switch doesn't trust Odin not to spy on his children.

This all comes to a head a few days after Odin's visit. While out and about, at least one member of the team gets a call from Station Operations.

"Uh, Strategic Response Team from Ops? I hate to call you of all people about this, but you're the closest militia members right now. We've got reports of a disturbance at Marco's Milkshakes. It seems like Switch and Loki are at it again, over."

If the PCs choose to respond to the dispatch, they arrive at the milkshake shop to find a scene of minor carnage. A table has been overturned, milkshakes have spilt everywhere and Loki and Switch are both yelling over one another, making it difficult to determine what either of them are saying, let alone what provoked the argument.

Switch's camera drones buzz about like angry wasps, except for one that lies twitching and sparking on the floor, transfixed by Loki's combat knife. The shop's serving staff are peeking out nervously from behind the counter, and the other patrons are clearly wondering if they should intervene or just leave.

Rat is leaning against a wall outside the shop, smoking in clear defiance of the Gate's policy. If asked what's going on, he explains that it was a perfectly normal outing like the three of them go on nearly every day. They were having a reasonable conversation, but Loki mentioned that he would have to depart the Gate fairly soon to go to Chameleon and resume work for his father. Switch made a somewhat catty remark about how out of character this was, and it all kicked off. This exact argument has been playing out in one form or another every day since Odin visited.

RECONCILING THE TWINS

Calming the twins down is going to take tact, empathy and even-handedness. Start two clocks. First, a six-segment clock called **Bias** with three segments ticked. This represents how much the twins perceive that the PCs are favoring one of them. Second, an eight-segment clock called **Tension** with all eight of its segments ticked, which represents how angry the twins are at one another.

This challenge can be handled either through roleplay or dice rolls. Either way, use the clocks to track the progress of the effort.

When the PCs make an argument that seriously favors Switch, untick segments on the **Bias** clock. When the PCs make an argument that seriously favors Loki, tick segments on the **Bias** clock.

Roll results may call for you to "balance" or "unbalance" the **Bias** clock. Its balance point is at 3 segments ticked. **Balancing** the clock means ticking or unticking segments to move the clock towards 3. **Unbalancing** the clock means the opposite: moving the clock further away from 3. If the clock is balanced, choose which direction to move it depending on what the players did.

On **9 or less**, choose one:

- Tick **2 Tension**.
- Tick **1 Tension** and flip a coin. If you lose the flip, unbalance the **Bias** clock by 1.
- Unbalance the **Bias** clock by 1**.**

On **10-19**, choose one:

- Balance the **Bias** clock by 1.
- Untick **2 Tension**. If the **Bias** clock isn't balanced, unbalance it by 1.

On **20+**, choose one:

- Balance the **Bias** clock by 2.
- Untick **2 Tension**.
- Untick **3 Tension**. If the **Bias** clock isn't balanced, unbalance it by 1.

FAILURE

The reconciliation effort fails if either of the following things happen:

- The **Bias** clock would have ticks added when it's already full, or ticks removed when it's already empty. The disadvantaged twin perceives the PCs as hopelessly biased towards the other.
- The **Tension** clock would have ticks added which it's already full. The PCs' shoddy mediation efforts only make the twins angrier.

In this case, one of the twins does something drastic; says something awful, throws a punch or hurls a treasured token of fraternal affection on the ground, and then storms off. The other one is reduced to quiet tears, and an awkward silence fills the shop.

SUCCESS

If the **Tension** clock is emptied without the **Bias** clock becoming too unbalanced, the twins tearfully hug it out and apologize to one another. Switch begs forgiveness for not letting their favorite sibling and best friend know they were alive all these years, which Loki freely gives. In turn, Loki asks Switch to trust him: if he does this one job for Odin, their father has promised he and the Armory will leave both of them alone for good. Rat breathes a sigh of relief and stops chain-smoking.

AFTERMATH

The team might want to talk to either or both of the twins afterwards. Where they are and what they're doing depends on how well the mediation attempt went.

If the team were unable to resolve Loki and Switch's dispute, they're now off in separate parts of the station. Loki has decided to leave for the Armory fleet right away and is packing his bags. Switch, meanwhile, is currently streaming themselves walking aimlessly around the station accompanied by sad music – behavior that their audience has decided is "a little bit cringe, actually."

```
CanonOfTempests: yo did ipswich baldur switch valentinian delacey just post classified armory schematics on the omninet to win an argument about FleetComm 5016

SwitchOfficial: No, I posted them to win an argument about Harrison Gacha, suck my metaphorical dick

CanonOfTempests: damn bro you could at least have actually won it then

                                    -  Muse chatter
```

It might still be possible to patch things up between the twins, but it's going to take a lot more work now. If one of them stormed out because they perceived the PCs to be biased against them, they may be unwilling to talk to the team at all. Tempers are high and there's a lot of emotional pain to deal with. This will take multiple scenes of empathizing and conflict resolution to solve.

If the twins were successfully reconciled, they're still spending some time apart to cool down – and Loki is still making preparations to leave for Chameleon – but they're in much better spirits. Loki is looking at places to live in Calliope once he's done with Odin's errand. Switch, meanwhile, is doing an "unboxing" video of their freshly-printed IPS-N Tortuga, which they're calling the *Frame Perfect Skip*.

TALKING TO SWITCH

Whether they're moping around the station in a haze of self-pity or eagerly showing off their brand-new Tortuga, Switch is broadcasting it live to the galaxy. If the PCs show up to talk with them, they'll be on camera too, so make them aware of that.

Switch's mood will be dependent on how things went with Loki, but also on how the PCs treated them. If Switch felt like the PCs were favoring Loki too much during the argument, they'll resent it, even if the PCs successfully reconciled them.

If the PCs ask for an introduction to Odin, they will flatly refuse. They're never going to get tangled up in Odin's schemes again, and if the PCs know what's good for them, Switch says, they'll stay well clear as well. If Switch and Loki were reconciled, however, he says that they should talk to Loki.

"If you really need someone to set up a meeting with dad, talk to Loki. He's doing 'one last job' to get dad to leave us alone. I don't think dad will honor his word, but Loki thinks it's worth a shot, and I guess I have to trust him on that."

On the other hand, if the PCs ask them for an introduction to Lord Director Samuel Fry, Switch says they can have it done within the hour. Despite the outlandish nature of the boast, they're true to their word: with just a couple of calls, they arrange flight approach clearance to the PCV-GC *Sirona* and a meeting with the Lord Director.

If asked what's wrong on a deeper level, Switch tries to deflect or change topics. However, if a PC makes a convincing argument, is a close friend of Switch or rolls a **20+** on an appropriate skill trigger, they open up:

"I... sometimes, I feel like I'm just an average of whatever other people want of me. This intrusive feeling of being a… a patchwork creature, like I'm not REAL, like there's nothing inside me that's... ME!

*"Hell, I was raised from a child to kill God! And Loki wanted me to be the perfect twin-brother-best-friend, and my fans want me to say all the catchphrases and be the funny guy on the streams and-and-and **who am I**?! What do I do for myself?! Is it even me that wants to stop my father, or is that just what I think other people would want me to do?!*

"I never even chose a name for myself, like other Calliopeans! Ipswich DeLacey was an identity I stole to replace a name that was chosen for me! Have I ever actually chosen anything in my life? Has anything I've ever done been more than just a reflection of someone else? Do I even EXIST?!"

TALKING TO LOKI

Regardless of the PCs' skill as mediators, Loki is making ready to depart for Chameleon – the only difference is what sort of mood he's in. Depending on what happened during the altercation, he may or may not be interested in talking to anyone.

If the PCs ask for an introduction to Lord Director Fry, it turns out Loki's the worst person to ask. He once decided to act out at a formal dinner in order to embarrass his father, making some choice remarks about the Purview Navy, not realizing that Fry was standing right behind him. However, if the PCs were successful at reconciling him with Switch:

"But you know, Bal- that is, Switch, they swooped in and rescued the whole evening. That was the dynamic between us, you see? I'd get us in trouble, and they'd get us out. I think Fry was quite fond of them, actually. Maybe they could set up a meeting."

What Loki *can* do is provide access to his father. It takes him only seconds to set up a meeting between the PCs and Dr. Valentinian – as it turns out, Odin is just as interested in speaking to them. As a matter of fact, since Loki is going to Chameleon anyway, he can even arrange for transport, if the PCs don't want to travel on the *Dragon's Tooth* for some reason.

If asked what he's going through on a personal level, Loki initially tries to fob it off, insisting that he's fine. However, if a PC makes a convincing argument, is a close friend of Loki or rolls a **20+** on an appropriate skill trigger, they open up:

"I wrote a eulogy for Baldur, you know. I tried to read it at the service, but I was standing in front of an empty casket, because the accident hadn't even left a body I could say goodbye to. I cried; I cried so hard that I couldn't make it through the second sentence. That's how much my twin brother meant to me. I felt like part of me had been ripped out, like my heart was going to catch fire.

"They were alive the whole time! I could understand if they had to wait a few months to make the grief look real, but I spent six years in transit here and they never bothered to shoot me a message. And, and that was actually six years for them! I was in stasis at nearlight! When you met me, from my perspective my brother had only been dead for two months!

"Aren't I blessed? My twin is alive, when I thought they were dead. And they're doing so well! They've found a name and a life that they can claim for themselves, instead of being a pawn in my father's schemes. I should be happy for them, shouldn't I? So why does seeing them make me feel so… bitter?"

THE SOMBER KNIGHT

When he was only eighteen years old, Lucas Asidenos (p. ###), a kuirasser in the Federal Karrakin Army, was given a prophecy by an Augur of the Order Xenoglossia: he would live a short, violent life, and it would end in battle around a distant star, with the forces of Hell itself as his enemies.

That his death would not come for four decades was no consolation. The journey to that star would have to be made at nearlight, the clock ticking ten times slower; he would not be much older than thirty by the time he took his last breath. He had only thirteen years to live, and each one has rolled past with agonizing speed.

Now he has reached the stage upon which death will play out, and the appointed time fast approaches. The only thing remaining is for the forces of Hell to present themselves. Looking at recent events in the system, Lucas Asidenos is pretty sure he knows who they are.

Printloaf strides up to you in a corridor, raising a hand to get your attention. "Yo, some soldier boy from the Baronies is lurkin' round Aminata's Saloon asking questions about you. Guess you're popular lately."

Printloaf doesn't know much about the soldier or why he's here – he's just informing the PCs. If they want to know anything more, they're going to have to investigate themselves.

It's not hard to find him in the crowd. Even if everyone in the Saloon weren't staring at him, his spotless dress uniform sticks out like a sore thumb. The moment he sees you, an unreadable expression crosses his face. He strides purposefully over and extends a hand to you.

"It is a grave honor to be in your presence. You'll forgive me for my presumption, I hope, but I wanted to meet the people who will end my life in peace and friendship before the day comes when we're forced to be enemies. May I buy you a drink?"

Lucas Asidenos might seem bizarre to the PCs; initially, he assumes that the PCs are just as aware of their destiny as he is. He will eventually realize they aren't, and explains how the Augurs prophesized his death at the team's hands in a calm, matter-of-fact tone. He is absolutely convinced that this will happen, and that nothing can change this fact. It is simply fate; the way things will be.

At all times, Lucas treats the PCs with the utmost dignity and respect, unless they are very disrespectful towards him. He wants to make it clear he bears them no ill-will; he admires their prowess, and though he fears his imminent death, he is also sorry that they, in turn, will have to bear the burden of killing him.

WHY WILL WE FIGHT?

"I don't know yet. I'm but a soldier, and the politics of the Baronies are not for me to question. All I know is that we will be on opposite sides of the conflict."

WHY DO YOU TRUST THIS PROPHECY?

"The Order Xenoglossia have guided the Baronies for generations untold. Their predictions have never once been wrong. Why should I be special? Why should I alone be outside of fate?"

WE DON'T WANT TO KILL YOU!

"And I don't want to die. But that is how it will be."

WHY NOT JUST KILL US RIGHT NOW?

"Because that is not how it happens. Because I would not sully my honor and that of the Baronies by meeting you under the auspices of peace only to forsake them. Because your home needs you alive. Because I am not a coward who would fruitlessly try to escape my destiny through murder."

WHAT IF WE KILL YOU RIGHT NOW?

"Then that would be intensely dishonorable, since I have come here under a flag of truce. I would die an inglorious death fighting gutless cowards. No. That is not how this plays out."

If the PCs attempt to kill Lucas right now, they simply *can't*. Even a **20+** roll on a skill trigger, or a Bond power that would allow them to instantly kill someone (such as The Wolf's **Tear Throat**) will inflict only minor injury. Lucas seems impossibly lucky, and any assault against him suffers dreamlike setbacks; punches are poorly timed, landing with insufficient force, knives turn sideways at the last moment, barely grazing him, and even bullets seem to avoid him, while guns jam or misfire. It's as if the universe itself refuses to let him die.

Assuming the PCs remain friendly, he'll share a drink with them, and then present them with a set of Baronic Unified Command credentials that will allow them past the Karrakin blockade of Asphodel. If questioned about why the Baronies are here in the first place, he will give a brief explanation of the circumstances surrounding minor house Aniline and the clone-lord Basil.

"To sum it up, a possible heir of a minor house is in recusatio tensionis *– that is, unworthy refusal of a duty that is within his power to uphold. He is needed for the resolution of a succession crisis, and we have been sent to retrieve him. We believe he hides within Furnace City, and endangers all within by his cowardice. We have no quarrel with anyone else – not even the soulless dogs of Harrison Armory."*

PEER PRESSURE

It's safe to say that Howl (p. ###) is one of Calliope's biggest celebrities, and much beloved among its people. She's not just an arena pilot; she's an activist, an aid worker, and almost as famous for the work she does to help others as for being Hellfire Champion. Even if she was dethroned during **Act 1**, people will turn out in droves to any event she's rumored to be at.

Unsurprisingly, when a public rally is announced with Howl as the speaker (with local band Pyrite Rage as a warm-up), even the Gate's largest meeting hall is packed to the brim. If she knows the PCs only by reputation, she arranges for them to receive invitations; if she knows them personally, she invites them herself.

If the PCs show up, they're treated to a raucous hour of ear-obliterating hardcore punk, and then, after Pyrite Rage has done their set, then performed the much-demanded encore of "*Nobody Even Asked You (To Lick The Boot But Here You Are Choking On It)*," they play Howl's entrance music, and she arrives on stage to furious applause, grabs the microphone and launches straight into her speech.

"You don't need me to tell you how bad things are. You can all see it. We've got a Cult raising the dead, foreign armies waving guns on our doorsteps, and through it all, the people of the Thousand Habs are being gouged for bare essentials by a petty tyrant. Refugees turn up every day, desperate for food and water. We have so little ourselves, but we can't turn them away.

"We've already seen that Steele thinks the people of this system belong to him, when he tried to steal our brothers and sisters for his fucked-up deathmatch! But it won't stop there. It won't stop until every drop of water, every sesame seed, every stem of kale has a price tag he controls! He'll plunge this system into famine just to line his pockets! He will enslave every single one of us with debt and hunger if we let him! He will hold the very life of this system hostage!

"So, I'm calling on everyone in Hell's Gate tonight: are you gonna let some billionaire take our system from us? Or are you gonna stand up? Are you gonna fight for Calliope? Are you gonna join me, and take Impact Plaza back for the people?!"

There is a furious cheer from the crowd, and you can't help notice some heads turning towards you.

Howl's speech isn't just for the crowd – it's also for any PCs who showed up, and she's not subtle about it. She wants the PCs in her coalition, and she's willing to go to any length to make sure that happens. Her approach will depend on how well she already knows them.

If she's already friends with them, she'll be subtle and respectful about it. She'll make nods to their presence, but won't attempt to pressure them. She hopes that one or more of them will volunteer for the coalition on the spot, but won't try to force the issue if they don't. Instead, she'll wait to approach them in private after the rally to formally request their help.

If she only knows them by reputation, Howl doesn't have time to play nice, and resorts to less savory tactics. She wants the PCs to feel pressured to sign up; sure, it's not the kindest thing to do, but if it'll save millions from debt and starvation, it's worth it. If the PCs seem hesitant or uninterested, she's not above using blatant emotional blackmail, insinuating that they're not as heroic as they appear to be.

Howl isn't just trying to recruit the PCs, though; she's recruiting anyone who knows how to handle a firearm, carry a stretcher or fix a fuel pipe. This risks draining manpower on Hell's Gate at a critical time; warn the PCs that one segment on both the **Station Stability** and **Militia Readiness** clocks will be unticked if they don't act.

Howl will only agree not to poach from the Gate in return for a promise that the PCs will address Impact Dynamics crisis first – a promise she will fully expect them to keep. If the PCs agree to this, the clocks remain untouched, but Howl will be furious if they renege on the agreement later. If the PCs don't agree, the clocks are modified as above.

Howl will remain on the station for a few days after the rally, chasing down debts and favors people owe her. If the PCs want to talk to her, it's likely she'll be in the middle of one of these conversations when they find her. She's looking for anything that can help the war effort against Steele, whether it's personnel, materiel or financial. If you want to provide further motivation or tension for a PC, put one of their friends or contacts on the hook for something Howl did for them years back.

Howl's not blind to the dubious morality of her actions; she knows Hell's Gate needs these people, and that many of them would rather not fight. She continues regardless, because she's seen the cost of inaction.

"When the history books are written, they can call me an extremist if they want. They did the same to Liddell Ross – but if he hadn't acted, Skyhammer would've killed the Union fleet the moment they arrived above Nestor. Sometimes doing nothing is so much worse."

REAL-LIFE SUPERHERO

He’s here! It sounds impossible, but SSC Constellar Security ace pilot “Hero” Harris Bordeaux is here – right here on Hell’s Gate!

THE CONCOCTION

Ever since the Battle of Fort Cerberus, BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER has been acting strange. It's not unheard of for him to invent new drinks without prompting, and his inventions fall into two main categories: drinks that resemble Margaritas, and drinks that are terrible. This time, however, he's refusing to share his newest invention with anyone until the PCs sample it first. He calls it the "Amphion Eclipse" and insists that only they're allowed to order it.

Given the affection Hell's Gate has for BARTENDER, people love to try his drinks even when they're awful, so the PCs will be constantly nagged about the drink until they actually try it.

BARTENDER's screen displays a huge smile upon hearing your order.

"I am so **[elated]** that you chose to sample the **[Amphion Eclipse]**! It is a 2:1:1 mixture of potato vodka, crème de menthe and apple soda, served over ice with cucumber garnish! Enjoy!"

The taste is certainly… novel.

"I am so glad that you enjoyed the **[Amphion Eclipse]**! Please return to GMS_GENERIC_BAR after last call! I will make you **[an offer you can't refuse]**!"

AN OFFER YOU CAN REFUSE

BARTENDER will wait patiently for the PCs to arrive at closing time that night. If they do not, over the next few days, he will start asking other station residents to nag them about it in return for free drinks until they show up.

BARTENDER wordlessly ushers you into a cramped little backroom off to one side of the bar. Once the door is closed and you have some privacy, he begins to speak.

"It means a lot to me that you accepted my invitation! I really appreciate it! I **[might]** have an important mission for you, but I must first ensure that you are not **[goddamn snitches who'll rat me out to the feds]**! Please convince me of your integrity and discretion after the tone! BEEP!"

How the PCs prove themselves to BARTENDER is up to them to decide; encourage them to be imaginative. If it convinces you, it probably convinces BARTENDER.

"Analysis: I am **[ninety-seven-point-three-four percent]** convinced you are trustworthy! I will now share important information that is likely not known to most other residents of Calliope, so please pay attention!

"Underneath the surface of Amphion, there is an SSC facility constructed more than a thousand years ago! It contains a powerful supercomputer built to conduct research that was **[super illegal]** by the laws of both that era and today!

"The discovery of this facility would be pretty **[bad]** for SSC, so they want to destroy it before anyone else can find it! You must not allow this to occur!

"I can give you approximate coordinates for an outlying maintenance tunnel which will allow you to access the facility! Once you locate the tunnel, you must **[enter the dungeon]** and directly connect the core computer to the facility's defensive systems! This will give it access to enough firepower to defend itself against the SSC Skyhook currently in orbit!

"Once you have done this, SSC will no longer be able to ~~**[dissemble and connive]**~~ hide the existence of the facility, and will be forced to capitulate to Union in order to avoid a ruinous legal investigation! This will resolve the threat to Three Sisters! Isn't that great?"

BARTENDER will answer questions on this topic, but if a PC has a Bond power that allows them to discern truth from lies, they may be frustrated to discover that it doesn't work on BARTENDER. It is not merely that his statements can't be determined as true or false; it is that his statements don't even register as statements. It's as if he isn't speaking at all.

This is partly because, as a machine, he has no subtle tics or tells that indicate truth from lies. However, it's also because BARTENDER *isn't the one speaking;* something else is using him as a proxy.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL OF THIS?

Mind tries to evade this question, if possible.

"As BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER, it is my business to provide the highest level of engagement and diversion for customers of GMS_GENERIC_BAR! In your case, the best way to do that is to find interesting things for you to do in your **[multi-ton metal death machines]**!"

WHY DO YOU CARE ABOUT THIS?

"Due to its **[self-optimizing nature]**, the core computer has become a vital component of the Muse! If it gets **[obliterated]**, the **[damage]** to Calliope's information networks and the comp/con units connected to them would be **[catastrophic]**! This **[must not]** happen!"

This isn't technically a lie, but it's not the whole truth. The entity puppeteering BARTENDER isn't as concerned with the state of the Muse as it is with the continuation of its own existence.

THE BRIEFING

At some point, it all comes to a boil, and Jerry sends an urgent message to the team. It's only four words long: "**my office, right now**."

When you arrive, it's pandemonium. Ipswich DeLacey and Loki Valentinian are both there, bickering furiously, not just with each other but Chief McArthur, Zinfandel DeJean and Howl as well, who are also taking pot-shots at one another. Shelly's hologram blinks in and out of view all over the office, currently manifesting seventeen arms, all pointing accusing fingers at various people in the room. Jerry is leaning his head on his hand, his eyes glazed over, looking even more done with the world than usual.

"You don't know our father, Jerry!" Switch declares. "Me and my brothers have been through shit that would make your blood turn cold!"

Loki whirls on Switch. "Wait, who the hell gave you permission to speak for all of us, Switch? I think you abdicated that right when you faked your death and assumed a cover identity!"

"Oh, that's rich coming from you! You didn't even wait until my body was cold to ditch the family!"

"YOU WEREN'T EVEN DEAD!"

Howl balls her hands into fists. "Resolve your daddy issues on your own time! We've got a refugee crisis caused by a corporate dictator charging two manna for a tomato–"

Chief McArthur looks ready to gut someone. "I'm sorry, you want to assault Impact Plaza while we've got ANOTHER doomsday weapon hovering over Furnace City? Have you completely lost your–"

Shelly rearranges nine of the twenty-six arms she's currently wielding. "Are any of you seriously suggesting we ignore the SSC Skyhook threatening the largest shipyard in Calliope?! Do you have any concept of–"

*Jerry takes a deep breath, slams both of his hands flat on his desk and hollers at the top of his lungs. "**SHUT THE FUCK UP!**"*

Absolute, stone-cold silence settles over the room. With an eerie calm, Jerry adjusts his tie, cracks his neck, tidies his desk and looks up at your team. "Oh good. You're here."

Give the PCs a little time to interact with everyone in the room and get their bearings. After this, Jerry shoos everyone but the team out of the office, promising he'll speak with them at a later time.

Jerry collapses back into his chair and buries his head in his arms. Without looking up, he slides a folder across the desk to you. It contains several photographs. The first is of a large wreck being towed towards Kantele, the moonlet of Kalevala the Cult have holed up on.

"That's a long-range image from the Icebreaker Borealis. That wreck is what's left of the PCV-DN Bellerophon, an Armory dreadnought that got mission-killed seventy years ago."

The next is a shot of the wreck's prow in closeup, with a large cylindrical device being lowered into it.

"That's a covert photograph from a Union spy embedded in the Cult. It's the mining laser Andros Capella stole from the Gate twenty-four years ago. The spy's last transmission before we lost contact was 'three months at most.' We've got just under three months before they have something that can crack Kantele open."

Jerry looks up at you.

"We've got to stop them, and to do that we need an army we don't have. But three whole armies just turned up on our doorstep, and the way I hear it, Howl's building a fourth to storm Impact Plaza and get rid of Steele. I'm gonna be honest: I don't have a plan. You're going to have to wing it. Find out why the Armory, the Baronies and SSC are here, and how to secure their support. Help Howl get Steele out of the picture.

KILEYNA MORTON THEY/THEM

UNION LIAISON TO CALLIOPE

"I always told them they'd regret ignoring the border worlds. Sucks to be Cassandra."

For forty years, Kileyna has been at the bottom of every list. To those who thought of them at all, they were a petty bureaucrat working a dead-end job in a nowhere system. There was no reason to pay attention to their career, nor to afford them any more time or manna than could possibly be avoided.

Then half of Union got to watch an FCA violation in real time, and suddenly everyone wants to know if they can get Kileyna anything – a bigger food aid budget, a larger office, more staffers, two hundred GMS SP-1 Everest licenses? They're being invited to top-level meetings with department heads. They're no longer squeezed into ten-minute speaking slots during subcommittee hearings; they need but send an email and the whole of CentComm assembles, *just for them.*

It's hard not to feel resentful. If this crisis had never happened, Kileyna would still be ignored and forgotten, and Calliope would still be suffering in silence. CentComm only care now because Kileyna is the only official civilian asset they have in system. And, Kileyna asks themself, how long will this new generosity and attention last once the crisis is over?

Every day since the Battle of Fort Cerberus, they have to remind themselves *it's not about them*; it's about the system and its people. It's Kileyna's responsibility as the face of Union in Calliope to put Calliope's interests first, even if the rest of Union is inconstant. It hasn't been easy – they nearly got themselves fired during a recent CentComm hearing – but they have resolved to never again accept anything less than the time and attention their system deserves.

MERCEDES ORDAZ SHE/HER

UNION NAVY CAPTAIN

"Rest assured; the gloves are finally off. Anyone looking for a fight with Union will get one."

Born just under sixty years ago in the Core Worlds, Mercedes could've lived a life of quiet contentment in the lap of post-scarcity luxury. felt the call of adventure and signed on with the Union Navy,

Mercedes Ordaz has a suspicion about her posting. All assignments to Calliope are voluntary, but shortly after she made Captain, her superiors enthusiastically encouraged her to do a tour there. To wit: they sent her on what amounts to a twenty-five-year deployment doing *nothing*. Were they saying they didn't think she could be trusted with a *real* assignment? That they wanted her out of the way?

This idea weighs on her – now more than ever, since her carrier is the only Navy ship in the system. Since she first arrived here, she's struggled with feelings of worthlessness. Union never allowed her to do anything useful before, and even now that she's finally off the leash, she has just one ship against a Cult that has been plotting for years, maybe decades.

Now is not the time for personal grievances or self-doubt, though; there's bad guys to fight and good people to save. You do what you can with the people you have.

Placeholder

UNION MILITARY ASSETS

Placeholder

UNS-CV *THAMES*

AMAZON-CLASS LINE CARRIER

The GMS *Amazon*-class is the workhorse of the Union Navy: solid, adaptable and dependable, with a long and distinguished service history. Everywhere ships of the Union Navy fly, the *Amazon*-class is among them. It defies the traditional adage of "GMS creates, corprostates innovate" by doing a lot of innovation itself; the platform is regularly updated to keep it competitive. The most recent major upgrade was the inclusion of new, state-of-the-art print bays to allow for expedited repair and refit of strike craft and mounted chassis wings.

The *Thames*, however, didn't catch that refit, because it was already four years into a ten-year flight through the Long Rim. People see the carriers arrive and leave on a five-year schedule, but often don't consider the ten lightyears of space one has to travel through to get to and from the system. A quarter of a century, twenty years of it realtime debt, all to protect a backwater system whose residents would prefer you not be there in the first place.

Morale on the *Thames* is an odd thing. All carriers assigned to Calliope are staffed entirely by volunteers; Union wants to ensure that anyone who signs up knows precisely what they're getting into. This means that volunteers come from ships all over Union space, with little continuity. A crew will be assembled and a ship chosen for a Calliope tour, and then if they perform well together, that ship and its crew will be sent elsewhere in the galaxy. Volunteers for a second tour are rare.

Most of the *Thames*' crew had never worked with each other before going into cryosleep. Mercedes Ordaz hadn't even met her executive officer until six days before they started the trip. Everyone had to get to know each other *in situ*, and become a crew while deployed. Now, the posting that was supposed to be the easiest job of their lives has turned into a crisis that will decide the future of a star system.

The *Thames* has been deployed for five years, longer than is usually permissible in the Navy – and after a subjective year at nearlight, to boot. Operating at full combat readiness for two months has taken a toll, and both the ship and its crew are exhausted. The *Thames* needs time in a shipyard, but the only station capable of servicing it is Three Sisters, and the *Thames* can't risk going there while SSC is still trigger-happy.

UNS-CV *MONONGAHELA*

AMAZON-CLASS LINE CARRIER

The *Monongahela* is the next Union Navy carrier on Calliope's rotation, scheduled to arrive in late 5016u. It was originally supposed to relieve the *Thames*, but Union has now stated that both carriers will be called upon to remain in Calliope at the same time to assist in resolving the crisis.

Union's public-access omninet site for Calliope lists its commissioning date as 5004u – this will be its first mission. Its commanding officer is Captain Stephanie Aikawa-Harrell.

The *Monongahela* periodically realigns to realspace to receive updates from Navy Central Command, but its final check-in before arriving to Calliope occurred at the start of the year, well before the current crisis began, so its crew will not be aware of the danger.

THE CONDEMNATION

It comes as a rush of

[A HAWK'S CRY, THE IMAGE OF A FOREST TORN BY A HURRICANE, A FEELING OF IRREPRESSIBLE RAGE]

ODIN VALENTINIAN

AGENT OF MISERY, ABUSER, MURDERER, TORTURER,
MONSTER IN HUMAN FLESH

I SEE YOU AS YOU ARE AND AS YOU WERE AND AS YOU WILL BE

IT WAS **YOU**

IT WAS **YOU** THAT DOOMED MY WORLD

YOUR BLASPHEMOUS UN-FLAME TOUCHED THE HOLY VOID
AND LEFT THE SKY'S WOMB BARREN

I SEE YOU, ONE-EYED KING

HANG FROM YOUR TREE

I SEE YOU, APOSTATE WANDERER

BLEED BY WOLF'S JAWS

I SEE YOU, MANY-FACED SCHEMER

BURN IN WORLD'S END

I ABJURE I ABJURE I ABJURE

I ABJURE I ABJURE I ABJURE

I ABJURE I ABJURE I ABJURE

THRICE BY THRICE I ABJURE YOU

BY THE ANCIENT EYE AND NAME OF THE SUN

I UNVEIL YOU SERVANT TO LEVIATHAN

GO BACK TO THE DEEP

BITE YOUR OWN TAIL

DIE IN THE DARK

connection established//ENCRYPT HECTOR-SAMEKH

DRIVETRAIN'S SUPER SECRET SIGDIVER HIDEOUT

MOTD:

keep horus vs. horizon drama out of channel, we're all here to dive

big love to S1GN4L wherever you are right now, miss ya buddy

ffs client x was odin motherfucking valentinian --ADMIN

DRIVETRAIN: alright everybody shut the fuck up

DRIVETRAIN: and this is not a funny hahaha everyone roast dt for trying to bring order moment

DRIVETRAIN: this is a five star shut the fuck up

DRIVETRAIN: somebody snitched on @God0fMischief and now she's in the fucking purv prison camp

DRIVETRAIN: i want to make one thing unmistakably clear

DRIVETRAIN: we have a rule in this channel about no horus vs. horizon drama

DRIVETRAIN: but i am making a fucking extension of that rule

DRIVETRAIN: we are officially going system wide with that

DRIVETRAIN: i don't care what uncle thinks

DRIVETRAIN: uncle can fully kiss my ass he doesn't live here

DRIVETRAIN: i have instructed my cell to cease all offensive operations against horizon

DRIVETRAIN: horizon cells i've been in contact with have done the same

DRIVETRAIN: we are in an indefinite bilateral ceasefire

DRIVETRAIN: and we have agreed on one very specific rule for all our members

DRIVETRAIN: we DO NOT bring union or ha or ssc or the ktb into beef

DRIVETRAIN: harrison armory in particular are straight up arresting and detaining people

DRIVETRAIN: and it's mostly horizon so i'm sure certain horus peeps are saying "well why not use that to our advantage? why not narc and get them snatched up?"

DRIVETRAIN: entirely fuck you if you are one of those people, you are DEAD to me

DRIVETRAIN: if i find out anyone here narced on a fellow sigdiver or anyone at all for that matter i will rain down an agony on you so excruciating the fires of hell will seem like a relief

DRIVETRAIN: that goes double for anyone in my cell

DRIVETRAIN: we are calliopeans and we are sigdivers

DRIVETRAIN: we DO NOT narc

DRIVETRAIN: we DO NOT narc to socdem technocrat gunboat diplomats

DRIVETRAIN: we DO NOT narc to cryptofascist empire builder space cops

DRIVETRAIN: we DO NOT narc to eugenicist freak doctors

DRIVETRAIN: and we DO NOT narc to goofy monarchist child murderers

DRIVETRAIN: if we start narcing on one another then we just turn our system into even more of a hellscape than it is right now, we start becoming pawns in their shitty games

DRIVETRAIN: because if one person starts using corpo swine as an i win button everyone will do it

DRIVETRAIN: and we turn our home into just another one of their battlefields

DRIVETRAIN: we go nuclear and nobody wins, everybody loses

DRIVETRAIN: we do not narc

DRIVETRAIN: do i make myself

DRIVETRAIN: one hundred percent

DRIVETRAIN: unambiguously

DRIVETRAIN: totally

DRIVETRAIN: without a shadow of a doubt

DRIVETRAIN: CRYSTAL FUCKING CLEAR

BEAT ??:
PLOT HOOKS

Placeholder

MISSION 6: CALM

Mission 6 is the first mission players will participate in during **Act 2**, when the **Calliope Clock** is at **Calm**. Although all four of the relevant factions have made troubling moves, nothing drastic has happened yet – but there are clear signs that if things aren't stopped, the situation might escalate.

HARRISON ARMORY

Harrison placeholder

- Controversy erupts across the system when a group of Armory Legionnaires publicly arrests a Horizon Collective cell leader on the Icebreaker Borealis. The situation is further complicated when it's revealed that she's Odin Valentinian's ex-wife, Lyra Van Kraanen.
- In the wake of Lyra's arrest, other Purview dissenters and deserters are terrified about the Armory presence. Some of them have gone missing – it's unclear whether they've also been taken, or if they've gone to ground.
- Ipswich DeLacey comes to the team, asking for their help in controlling the situation:

"Okay, guys, I realize that what I'm about to say is a lot to take just on faith, but you don't know my dad like I do. He's delusional, obsessive and if we don't put a stop to whatever the fuck he's doing, there's going to be blood. The Harrison Armory fleet have built a Glasscage out there. That's an Armory structure for researching spatial anomalies; I bet it's related to that weird ship you found out there!"

- Loki Valentinian approaches the PCs:

"I can't believe this. Fry's arrested mother as some kind of stupid power play against father! Purview dissenters are terrified about getting rounded up and sent to Coldwater 484. A lot of people are going to get hurt if we don't sort this out!"

- The team get a message from a protest flotilla currently in orbit over the Armory prison colony, requesting their presence.

IMPACT DYNAMICS

Impact Dynamics placeholder

- Impact Dynamics announces a new wave of "surge pricing," putting many basic foodstuffs beyond the means of poorer citizens in the Thousand Habs. This has created a refugee crisis on Hell's Gate, as hundreds of people have come to the station asking to be put on basic assistance.
- Surveillance reports heavy activity on both of Asphodel's moons. Impact Dynamics appears to be reactivating an old manufacturing facility on Eurydice, and building a new structure on Orpheus.
- Returned from the Icebreaker Borealis during the Hellfire League's off-season, the (possibly former) League champion Howl wants to talk to the PCs about Impact Dynamics.

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Karrakin placeholder

- If the PCs managed to save the abductees without any major repercussions for Furnace City, they get a call from Canaan Zhou:

"Hello, it's Canaan Zhou – we met during the abduction crisis? I was Temporary Overseer at the time. I was impressed by how well you took care of things; specifically in that the city didn't get hit by a laser. I'm not contacting you in any official capacity, but you seem to be capable problem-solvers and we've got one hell of a problem over here."

- If the PCs met Clip Magazine during their visit to Furnace City, he contacts them:

"Good morning, fireteam! I hear you're assembling a coalition to go after Andros Capella and his cult of zombie freakoids! Well, soldiers, I'm two hundred percent on board! I just need your help with a teensy-tiny problem over here: a giant army of monarchist scum threatening our fair planet! You help me get rid of them, and I'll make sure every gun-hand in the Terra Solus is behind you!"

- The PCs receive an advertisement from Ratio Salvager, with a "time-sensitive exclusive offer" that applies only to them:

"Down on your luck? Icicles melting in your pocket? Need new equipment, but don't have the cashflow for that shiny new Gandiva Launcher? Well, come on down to Ratio's Golden Scrap and Salvage, where we find you the gear that puts dents in your enemies, NOT your wallet!

"For a limited time only, enjoy our exclusive offer, available only to… damnit. Steve! Can you look up the members of that mech squad from the Gate? I'm terrible with names. Okay, let's do another take.

*"**Don't delay – gild your ratio today!**"*

**Quality of reclaimed components not guaranteed by vendor. Refunds on explosive materials will not be granted post-detonation. Offer not valid for citizens of Begum or the Serene Republic of Triple Idaho.*

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

- Rumors are sweeping the Muse: people keep saying they've seen SSC poster boy "Hero Harris" Bordeaux. People in Calliope say they've seen celebrities all the time, but Harris has made no public appearances in more than a decade, so it's not actually impossible. Responses are split between enthusiasm, disbelief and theories about some kind of gonzo publicity campaign.
- There's talk of weird behavior from the Bleach Boys, one of the smaller pirate bands currently trying to fill the void left by the collapse of the Circuit and the Hell Hounds. Apparently, they've quit their usual racket of shaking down freighters near Orcus and gone suspiciously quiet. People have spotted a couple of their scout ships lurking near Amphion.
- BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER has been acting even glitchier than usual. He keeps mentioning the PCs by name, saying they should order a new drink he's has been working on called the "Amphion Eclipse." Apparently, nobody else is allowed to order this drink before the PCs taste it.
- If one of the PCs took the **Join a Salvage Crew** downtime activity and picked up Item 18, the escape pod with a false identity in it (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. 103-104), they get some bad news from station security: someone broke into their storage unit using a forged transfer manifest and stole it. The ship fled in the direction of Orcus.

MISSION 7: UNREST

Mission 7 is the second mission players will participate in during **Act 2**, when the **Calliope Clock** is at **Unrest**. While they have succeeded in resolving one of the system's major problems, the other three factions are advancing their agendas in a worrisome way.

HARRISON ARMORY

Harrison

- The Armory is continuing to round up "persons of interest," and ex-Purvs are starting to get frantic. Jerry is being called upon to deny all docking requests from Purview ships, but that won't stop independent bounty hunters. Some folks are turning to the Cult for protection.
- Rumors are sweeping through the system: the protest flotilla in orbit of the Armory prison camp have reported strange phenomena throughout the orbit of Chameleon – ghosts, specters, apparitions of dead loves ones, visions of past lives.
- Ipswich DeLacey comes to the team, once again asking for their help, and it's more urgent this time:

"Listen guys, I realize you had important shit to do last time. But now, I really need you to help me out. They keep rounding people up for that goddamn prison camp. They're talking about shipping them all back to Ras Shamra to stand trial! You can't let the Armory get away with this!

*"And worse, dad's doing… **something** at that research facility of his. I know how to look for, and apparently, so does Feather – you heard that message from the Cult! He's doing what he usually does: fucking with the fundamental fabric of our universe with no thought to the consequences! We've got to stop him!"*

IMPACT DYNAMICS

Impact Dynamics placeholder

- Reports sweep the system of the first direct military actions by Howl's coalition – some attacks on outlying facilities – which met with mixed success. In response, Rodericke Steele suspends food shipments to the Thousand Habs until a number of habitats submit to the installation of permanent "peacekeeping outposts" belonging to IDES, Impact Dynamics' private army.
-

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Karrakin placeholder

- If Canaan Zhou called the PCs before, they do so again, with more urgency:

"Hey, it's Canaan Zhou again! The situation here in Furnace City is getting a little bit, uh, dicey. There's a lot of pretty strident rhetoric flying around about the Karrakin. Clip Magazine seems to be making overtures towards the office of Temporary Overseer, and for all my respect for his service in the militia, I really don't think that's a good idea. I'm not precisely sure what you could do, but if you think of anything that could calm this situation down, I'm all ears."

- Regardless of whether or not he knows them, if the PCs performed well during **Mission 3**, Clip Magazine asks for an endorsement:

"Attention, soldiers! I have formally made a request to the City to grant me the title of Temporary Overseer for the duration of this crisis! We need to strike back against the encroachment of monarchists upon Furnace City and the Terra Solus! Will you stand with me to repel this threat to our fair system?!"

- The Karrakin Deputation broadcasts a system-wide address announcing a royal banquet on the Icebreaker Borealis, with an invitation addressed to the PCs to be guests of honor.
- The PCs receive another advertisement from Ratio Salvager, hinting that the time-limited deal they offered previously may be expiring soon:

"Worried about the state of the system AND your finances? Want to guard against an uncertain future, but short on capital? Divest your worries AND your liabilities at Ratio's Golden Scrap and Salvage, where we give you peace of mind while letting you keep your piece of the pie!

"For a limited time, that elite team from Hell's Gate who seems to have a knack for solving problems will get a 50% percent discount! That's right! I'm literally cutting my prices in half, just for you! You should come down right now!

*"**Don't delay – gild your ratio, today! Seriously, today! Like, literally right now!**"*

**Discount redeemable only in person. Still not valid for residents of Begum.*

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

SSC placeholder

- Outrage erupts across the system as SSC almost blows up a vessel belonging to a local news team which entered low orbit over Amphion. A missile was launched from the *Aspect Horizon,* and aborted only moments before it hit the team's ship. SSC has refused to comment, except to describe the incident as "entirely proportionate action taken to defend SSC trade secrets."
- A challenge is sent to the PCs by the pirate MEGACORRODER, leader of the Bleach Boys, a small-time criminal syndicate operating on Orcus: (p. ###).
-

MISSION 8: CRISIS

Mission 8 is the third mission players will participate in during **Act 2**, when the **Calliope Clock** is at **Crisis**. Two factions have been dealt with, but the two that remain are rapidly entering their respective endgames, with potentially disastrous outcomes for Calliope.

HARRISON ARMORY

Harrison

- Harrison Armory has run an official notice on all of the system's public channels, listing thousands of "persons of interest" and ordering them to immediately surrender to a Purview official for case review. It warns that station directors attempting to impede this process will be "considered hostile." Panic begins to spread throughout Calliope.
- The Cult has publicly declared it will shelter any and all refugees from Armory persecution, on condition that they convert.
- The protest flotilla requests immediate assistance, reporting that some form of violent, unexplained phenomena swept through their ships, causing several serious injuries and at least three fatal seizures. They believe it originated from the research facility in orbit of Saeculum.
- Ipswich DeLacey delivers an ultimatum to the PCs, cameras rolling to catch their response:

"I warned you! I warned you, and you didn't listen! I told you this situation would get out of hand if you didn't take care of it, and you just let it fester! Well, look at what's happening now! The Armory is openly rounding up every 'person of interest' in the system! My dad's cracking open spacetime above Saeculum!

"I'm going to Chameleon to fix all of this! You can either come with me and help, or you can stay here and let the whole galaxy know that you were too fucking cowardly to stand up to fascists!"

IMPACT DYNAMICS

Impact Dynamics

- Each day, hundreds of starving refugees from the Thousand Habs are arriving at every major settlement in the system. Hell's Gate is not exempt, and station services are overwhelmed; untick a segment on the **Station Stability** clock.
- Gossip from Impact Plaza has dropped off almost completely. Ominously, this occurred just after a new mandate from the Board of Directors declaring any unapproved commentary about the company made by one of its employees an act of sedition.
- Reports from Asphodel suggest that an attack was launched against Impact Dynamics' tritium refinery on Orpheus, and the facility was destroyed. IDES has launched retaliatory strikes against several habitats in the Inner Belt suspected to be harboring Howl's coalition.
- Howl has lost patience, and delivers an ultimatum to the PCs:

"I'm sick of asking you for help and getting blown off! People across the system are STARVING TO DEATH because of Steele and Impact Dynamics! I've been breaking my back putting together a coalition to take them down, and you've done SHIT ALL to help! Some 'Heroes of Calliope' you are!

"We can't win a war against the Cult on empty stomachs! There's gonna be nobody in the Thousand Habs left to save if we don't fix the system's food distribution!"

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Harrison

- The royal banquet has ended; if the PCs did not attend it, they have missed their chance.
- Breaking news from Furnace City: a snap election for the office of Temporary Overseer has been called. Current polling suggests that militia quartermaster Clip Magazine is poised to win against his competitor and previous Temporary Overseer Canaan Zhou.
- An outlander contacts Hell's Gate to warn them that a detachment of Furnace City's militia has been spotted at one of the old orbital accelerator sites in the Terra Solus, and seems to be repairing it.
- The PCs receive yet another transmission from Ratio Salvager, which by this point is less an advertisement and more a barely-disguised plea:

"I'm Ratio Salvager, and I'm having a blowout sale for Hell's Gate militia members! A hundred percent discount on EVERYTHING! That's right! You guys can just show up at the yard and take anything you want! The desk clock? Have it! My pocket watch? It's yours! Find something nailed down? Fuck it, I'll give you a claw hammer and you can just pull 'em out!

"I don't know what else I have to say to get you guys to come here and listen to me! Things are getting absolutely absurd down here in Furnace City – uh, um, absurd SAVINGS, that is!

*"**There's no slogan! Please just show up!**"*

**No, for real, I'm serious! Please come over here, guys. The problem is the Karrakin Deputation, who, to be clear, are still excluded from this offer.*

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

SSC placeholder

- Outrage sweeps the system. Two civilian vessels were shot down over Amphion after attempting to land on the planet's surface to watch an eclipse; there were no survivors. SSC delivers an ultimatum to the system; if anyone approaches Amphion, they will meet the same fate.
- Howl has lost patience, and delivers an ultimatum to the PCs:

"I'm sick of asking you for help and getting fobbed off! People across the system are

BEAT ??:
GETTING UPGRADES

Placeholder

IPS-N

IPS-N are the only major corprostate that doesn't seem to have any involvement in Calliope's latest wave of troubles – but "doesn't seem" is doing a lot of heavy lifting. Like almost everywhere else, IPS-N are so present that they've suffused the air and become like the cosmic background radiation; ever-present, yet undetectable unless you know what to look for.

- You get a call from an executive at IPS-N Trunk Security, and they're refreshingly direct with you: the current turmoil in Calliope threatens a lucrative Long Rim shipping route, and you look like you're well-positioned to deal with that. Would you like an IPS-N license for free, no strings attached? In the grand scheme of things, it would cost the company nothing compared to the potential loss of a shipping lane. It's a no-brainer investment – for both parties.
- Given the tumultuous situation in Calliope, a whole lot of tourists want to leave. An IPS-N captain is trying to free up space on their freighter to fit more cryobays, and that means stripping out their mech bays. He's willing to offer you one of the mechs for essentially nothing, as long as you waive your right to be entered into the evacuation lottery.
- The Calliopean Herald's headline today reads: **HEARTWARMING: Hell's Gate Community College Robotics Class Helps Cash-Strapped Militia by Building a Mech**

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

BEFORE SSC MISSION

- A scion of the Smith family contacts you: Abigail, younger sister to Cordelia. It's not much of a conversation; more of a rant about how wicked, vicious and spiteful her sister is, and oh, wouldn't it be a shame if whatever that *viper-tongued brown-noser* is working on went up in smoke? Oh, did she *accidentally* leave her executive discount code in full view of the camera? Well, she'll just have to *trust* that you won't use it to access SSC's premium catalog and ruin her sister's day, won't she?
- In a coincidence so convenient as to be suspicious, the SSC mech you want has gone out of fashion, and every aesthete with an ounce of good taste is trying to get rid of theirs. You can get one at a bargain price, but you'll have to suffer the humiliation of being a fashion victim.

AFTER SSC MISSION

- Given their recent actions against the system, it's considered harmful to one's image to own an SSC mech right now. One of Calliope's *nouveau riche* is willing to give you theirs, as long as you sign a binding legal contract promising you'll never tell *anyone* who you got it from.

HORUS

HORUS is interested in almost everything happening in Calliope right now, and that means they're willing to cut deals with anyone who can get them access to juicy intel or secrets. None of these deals are what you'd call normal, but they're positively banal compared to some of the other ways you might acquire their hardware.

- Some cubbyers have reported an "aggressive" fungal outbreak in a disused part of the Gate and you've been tasked to get rid of it. By the time you get to the relevant section, it has metastasized… into a mech. It seems perfectly functional, if musty.
- Muse chatter indicates that a new establishment has opened up in Raphael Baza's Bizarre Bazaar: a shopfront named "HORUS." You can just walk in and *buy* HORUS mech licenses – but not for money. Apparently, the going rate for a Minotaur PG printcode is "all memories of the third person you invited to your fifteenth birthday party."
- A Gate militia kiosk contacts you, stating that someone turned in your lost wallet. Reaching into your pocket, you discover that your wallet is still there. Nevertheless, when you get to the kiosk – there, also, is your wallet. It has your ID. It has just about as many ingots as you remember it having. It also has a pocket data drive, which you definitely *don't* remember it having.

HARRISON ARMORY

BEFORE HARRISON ARMORY MISSION

- You're contacted by none other than Dr. Sebastien Dumas, the Armory's *other* insufferably arrogant blinkspace genius. He and Dr. Valentinian have a bitter, decades-long rivalry, and he's willing to open up the Armory's catalogue to you, with the tacit understanding that you'll cause trouble for Odin.
- Horizon sigdivers are

AFTER HARRISON ARMORY MISSION

-

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

BEFORE KTB MISSION

- Lucas Asidenos contacts you again, informing you that the prophecies say you'll kill him using a different mech. You don't seem to own it, so the Augurs have seen fit to rectify this discrepancy.

AFTER KTB MISSION

- Placeholder – honor guard?

HARRISON PRESS

"IT'S BETTER THAN GOOD..

... IT'S MANDATORY!"

CRISIS ABOVE CHAMELEON:

INFINITE HYPERVERSE

STARRING...

OVERVIEW:
ONCE, WE WERE FAMILY

WRONG MAN, RIGHT PLACE

Like so many of the Armory's stories, it starts with a proud, fiercely opinionated man: Dr. Odin Valentinian.

An alumni of the Armory's famed Isaac-Sakata Center for Scientific Study, he claims to be the galaxy's foremost expert on blinkspace. While it's a daring boast, he has only one credible competitor for that title, who graduated the same year from the same school.

His doctorate thesis is required reading for blinkspace physics courses in many universities. The list of papers on which he has co-author credit number in the hundreds. He's published nine books, one of which was awarded Union's Little Starlight Award for its contribution to the advancement of scientific thought amongst children.

His advocates would say his mind is a brilliant fire. His critics would say his soul is a chunk of ice. Odin's peers have politely described him as "driven," "taciturn" and "imaginative." In moments of greater honesty, they use words like "obsessive," "callous" and "delusional."

Odin was just a child on Ras Shamra when the Black Throne Incident occurred, in which MONIST-1 intervened to stop Harrison Armory's research into decorporealization. This led to a standoff that ended in the utter annihilation of John Creighton Harrison II and most of the Home Fleet, after MONIST-1 distorted space and turned the navy's own weapons against them. Odin's parents, both naval officers, died that day, for nothing more than following orders.

For a century and a half, Dr. Valentinian has been consumed by a single, burning obsession: *MONIST-1 must die*. He's dedicated his entire life to this pursuit. It has been the ruin of his friendships, his marriage, his conscience and his relationship with his children. He's estranged from his friends and family. He has stolen technology from the pacifist Volador. He even turned his own sons into weapons, and his most beloved, Baldur, died from it. He has nothing left but his quest, and it has never borne fruit.

But now, two things have renewed his zeal: his favorite child yet lives, and he's found something that might finally deliver the weapon he needs. The Anomaly sits in orbit of Chameleon, a colorless, lightless wound in the laws of the universe. When Odin stares into it, he sees *potential* – he feels as if the secrets of space and time are his to grasp, if he only reaches out his hand.

RIGHT MAN, WRONG PLACE

Like so many of the Armory's stories, it starts with a proud, fiercely opinionated man: Samuel Fry.

Throughout his long and distinguished career, Lord Director Samuel Fry has been an outspoken critic of the Steward Council's aggressive expansionism and brutal treatment of dissenters. His objections managed to be both strident and measured, skirting the line of sedition but never crossing it. It made him extremely popular; too popular for the Steward Council to simply have him killed or removed from his post.

They did the next best thing: offer him a poison chalice. An assignment to the Dawnline Shore was, in theory, a prestigious and important appointment, but it would take him out of political action for nearly two decades of transit time. It would also put him far away from the Purview's halls of power.

Once he arrived, however, he quickly re-established his political following. Even better, he was in a position to personally observe the Purview's drastic mishandling of the Shore. Their mistakes, he warned, could easily lead to a costly and disastrous war.

The Steward Council responded again, but this time it was harder to disguise as anything other than petty political revenge. He was "awarded" command of a new Armory battlegroup for its "vital" inaugural mission, which turned out to be nothing more than a babysitting job in the Long Rim. The Steward Council's message is clear: if they can't silence the man himself, they'll strangle his career to death instead.

Moreover, they have attempted to humiliate him further: they assigned him a flagship that's still in the prototype stage. It's not yet ready for military release, and so riddled with technical issues as to be uninhabitable. He spends most of his time on the battlegroup's carrier, where a mysterious administrative error led to him being bunked in the executive officer's quarters, while a loyalist got the Admiralty suite. His ships are crewed by the dregs of Armory society; people with Socials so low they'd usually get thrown out of the military.

Fry has weathered all of this with stunning grace. He's fought entire *campaigns* in the name of the Armory, and you don't survive space battles – let alone *win* them – if you're short-tempered or easily provoked. He *remembers* every slight, though, and has a long list of illustrious people whose careers he's going to destroy – assuming he survives Calliope.

WRONG MEN, WRONG PLACE

Neither Dr. Valentinian nor Lord Director Fry have any loyalty to the Armory's current order. Odin's faith in it died with his parents, and he sees his relationship to the corprostate as purely transactional; a source of funding, expertise and materials in his crusade against MONIST-1. Fry, meanwhile, despises the kleptocratic travesty the Steward Council have made of the Purview in Harrison III's absence.

But they also despise each other. Valentinian considers Fry a preening, sanctimonious coward full of bold talk but no spine to back up his words. Fry, for his part, considers Valentinian a dangerous fanatic who uses his position on the Special Projects Group as an excuse to pursue personal vanity projects.

Both men are pursuing their own ulterior motives in this system. While Odin's supposed to be here studying the Anomaly and using it to perfect the Sunzi's blink engine, he's searching for a way to turn it against MONIST-1, all while trying to reunite with his long-lost child Baldur. Fry, meanwhile, is looking for something, *anything* he can use against the Steward Council.

Both men perceive the arrival of SSC and the Trade Baronies as a direct threat to their goals. Fry believes they're part of a plot by the Steward Council to finally get rid of him. Odin believes they're here to steal his research. This has forced an uneasy truce between the two men while they try to get a handle on the situation.

GOOD PEOPLE, BAD PLACES

There's a lot of people in Calliope about to get tangled up in the ambitions of these two men.

Loki Valentinian, Baldur's twin, left Harrison's World and the Dawnline Shore to get away from his father and the obsession that had killed his brother. He's furious that Odin has found a way to rope him back into his schemes, and resentful that his twin didn't trust him enough to bring him along when they escaped.

Thor and Tyr Valentinian, the two sons that didn't abandon Odin, are here as well. Both are victims of their father's obsession as much as Loki and Baldur, and both have had to suffer it for longer.

Lyra van Kraanen, Odin's ex-wife, is a traitor to the Purview wanted for, among other things, "liberating" NHPs from Odin's research campus. She's been living in Calliope as well, and in danger of becoming a political football along with the rest of Horizon. She's only the first of hundreds of political prisoners that the Armory intends to scoop up as housecleaning.

Finally, there's Odin's long-lost son, Baldur. They're still alive, living under the name Ipswich DeLacey, and given the events at Fort Cerberus, this dual identity is now public knowledge. They're technically a deserter. They've been selling Harrison Armory trade secrets to Horizon, so they're also technically a traitor. So far, no arrest warrant has been issued, but they're not convinced it'll stay that way.

Placeholder – Relationship map?

Verschlimmbessern (German) = To make something worse by trying to make it better

PERSONS OF INTEREST

SAMUEL FRY HE/HIM

LORD DIRECTOR OF THE PURVIEW NAVY

"The Aubergine is nothing. It's nothing but dye on cloth, if we don't MAKE it something more."

Fry joined the Purview Navy 143 realtime years ago. Starting as Ensign, he rose rapidly through the ranks, gaining the rank of Commandant and a carrier of his own after outstanding performance during the Chesapeake-4 Action. He then served with distinction during the notorious Battle of Sunset Harbor, where he turned what should have been a rout into an overwhelming victory. He was promoted to Group Captain in short order, and was instrumental in four victories during the Chemosh Campaign. From there, a position in the Admiralty was all but assured.

Fry's uniform is always spotless, his many medals proud and gleaming. There's a sense of fierce sincerity about the man that's difficult to describe; nothing about Samuel Fry is a pretense. When you see him, you see him for exactly who he is; nothing more, nothing less. This authenticity often leads people to assume Fry has no patience or head for politics; a crucial error that has ended the careers of many rivals.

Fry is a true believer: there's a vision of what the Armory is *supposed* to be, of the benefits it can bring to all humanity, and he shares in it. That vision is rarely fulfilled, and in Fry's view it's because the Armory spends too much time asking its subjects what they can do for it, rather than what it can do for them.

This outlook is the source of his success; he tends to find value in places others overlook. He's unlikely to treat the PCs with the disdain other men of his rank might. If they're competent, he sees opportunity and potential allies, regardless of their background.

DR. ODIN VALENTINIAN HE/HIM

HE WHO FIGHTS MONSTERS

"Oh, the trolley problem? No need to lay out a specific premise; I pull the lever."

Like many egotistical geniuses, Odin understands a few things very well, and so believes that all things may be explained through that lens.

It would be easy to assume that Odin sees everything around him as tools to get what he wants; it would explain how casually he subjects the people he claims to love to terrible hardship. The truth is somehow worse: in his own way, he feels an intense love for all humanity, but sees the truest expression of that love in creating a world in which they will not be subject to the whims of monstrous gods like YMIR and Feather.

He would torture one human if it meant saving the lives of a million. He would sacrifice a planet to save ten others. Even his own sons weren't exempt; in fact, to Odin, if the fate of the world was at stake and only hurting his children could save it, refusing would be the height of selfishness. He truly *does* feel guilt for the way his children have suffered at his hands – but that's just another one of his many burdens to bear.

Many blinkspace researchers have eccentricities, and Odin is no exception. He has a list of strange compulsions; he can't eat a meal if there's a prime number of items on his plate, for example. Adding to this, for a man of science, he's oddly superstitious, and he has a deep fascination with magic, occultism and daemonology bordering on obsession.

It should be noted that he doesn't look down on people who don't understand blinkspace; in fact, in some ways he envies them. Understanding can be a curse.

THOR VALENTINIAN HE/HIM

THE NEGLECTED

"Why does it matter what I think? It's not like you've ever cared before."

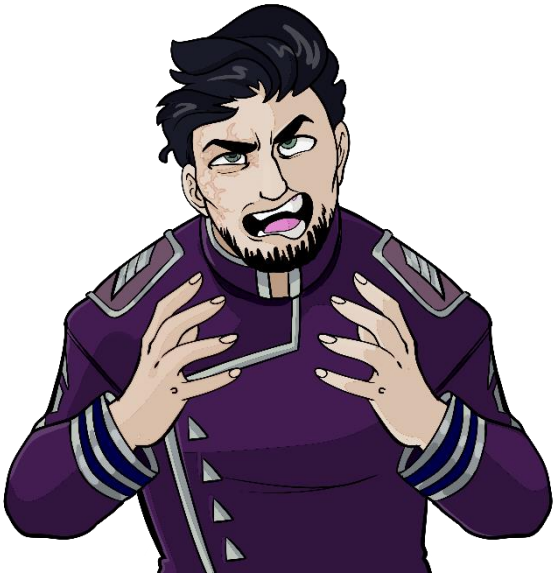
Odin Valentinian's eldest son was, in retrospect, a template for the misery the doctor would inflict upon his family. Thor's only crime was that he wasn't *perfect*. Intelligent, but not a genius. Articulate, but not a raconteur. Talented, but not a virtuoso. An athlete, but not a medalist. That wasn't good enough for Odin.

Odin made arrangements for the finest in schooling and military training, of course. Any purchase the boy wanted was granted, but it was never about Thor – it was simply that Odin wanted to maintain his standing, and anything less than the best for his son would've harmed his own reputation.

Tall, statuesque and broad-shouldered, Thor cuts an imposing figure that masks a gnawing insecurity. Not only did he have to live his entire life a disappointment, he had to watch it happen two more times to his brothers – and finally, he had to watch his youngest sibling get the love and attention that he wanted all his life, and then die from it.

Thor has always felt like a passenger in his own life. He has no agency over anything – choices are things other people make, and he just gets to experience their consequences. Events are things that *happen to* him, never things he *participates* in.

Above all, he's consumed by a terrible fear: everything he loves is always taken from him. His father, his mother, his brothers; one after the other, they all go away in the end. The news that Baldur still lives and Loki is here fill him with joy and horror in equal measure; how long before they're ripped away again?



TYR VALENTINIAN HE/HIM

THE WOUNDED

"Damn you to Hel! How much more do I have to suffer to prove myself?! Why can't you SEE me?!"

At first, Odin Valentinian's second son seemed to be everything he wanted: intelligent from a young age, with a keen intellect and razor-sharp reflexes. But there was something behind the boy's eyes – or rather, there wasn't. There was a coldness, a sort of distance, and it disquieted Odin. Tyr didn't smile enough for Odin's liking. He was too quiet when other children were noisy.

Perhaps he was an abject lesson in Odin's hypocrisy: he reminded the doctor too much of himself.

Tyr considers his lot to be even worse than Thor's. From Tyr's perspective, Thor never pleased Odin – he never knew what it was like to be anything other than a failure. Tyr felt just a touch of his father's love, and then was cast aside because Odin thought he couldn't feel anything at all.

After Baldur died and Loki walked away, Tyr was the best Odin had left. That was how Tyr finally got his father's attention again: *by default*. But he could never live up to the impossible standards Baldur had set in their father's mind, and trying has left him deeply maimed. His right leg, arm and eye are all prosthetic, the original flesh lost in a catastrophic accident. His father's endless money healed most of the physical scars, but it hasn't healed the deep loathing Tyr feels – for his brothers, for his father, and for himself.

Now the family is reunited, and Odin barely waited a day before trying to get Baldur and Loki back. The sons that ran away, faked their own death, stole father's prototypes, consorted with the Armory's enemies – of course father still wants them back! Of course, even after everything, *it's always the bloody twins!*

LOKI VALENTINIAN HE/HIM

THE PRODIGAL

"Well, the world really must be ending, because somehow *I'm* the responsible one now!"

The team already knows Loki Valentinian: a rebellious free spirit who never bowed to his father's authority. He's Baldur's twin, and his brother's death hit him hardest of all.

Loki had everything his father wanted – tactical and strategic genius, consummate skill in both personal and mechanized combat, an intuitive grasp of complex scientific concepts, peerless athleticism. He was the perfect son Odin had been seeking, but for one aspect: his attitude. He hated the training, the relentless drilling, his father's coldness and violent obsession. He hated what it did to his family.

Unique among the three "failed" brothers, Odin didn't reject Loki: Loki rejected him. But what hurt most of all is that it didn't even matter; Odin already had Baldur. What need had he of Baldur's shadow?

Recent events have left Loki conflicted. On the one hand, his beloved twin still lives. On the other hand, that twin has a different name, a different face, a different voice, and never bothered to tell him they were still alive. What's Loki to make of that?

Loki is tired; tired of the world, tired of his father, tired of himself, tired of the petty arguments and the trauma. He wants out – for himself in particular, but for as many of his siblings as he can manage as well. Paradoxically, this makes him the most willing to work with Odin, just so he can be left alone afterwards.

IPSWICH DELACEY THEY/THEM

THE RETURNED

"We'll resolve this familial dysfunction after a quick word from tonight's sponsor!"

Baldur Valentinian, Loki's twin, was finally what Odin had always wished for: athletic, graceful, brilliant, cunning – "naturally gifted." He exhibited none of Thor's "mediocrity," none of Tyr's "coldness" and none of Loki's "rebelliousness." Baldur was perfect. He was the warrior Odin would use to kill YMIR.

At the age of seventeen, he was one of the Armory's youngest AAA-rated chassis pilots. He was test-driving Odin's prototypes. He was leading groups of veterans four times his age in simulations.

But one of those simulations wasn't a simulation. At the age of nineteen, Baldur discovered that he'd been remotely controlling a real mech, seizing real Volador tech, killing *real* people. In response, he faked his own death and fled to the Long Rim by teleporting his father's prototype further than it had ever gone before.

They became a different person, but they still had a compulsive need for attention and praise. The persona of Ipswich "Switch" DeLacey and *Live from the Long Rim* became the vehicle for that need. Deep down, they knew it couldn't last forever.

Now, all the choices in their life are coming home to roost – all the choices they made, and all the choices that were made for them. Ipswich tries to hide it, but they're deeply unwell. The pressure of being trained from birth to be a weapon, the shock of being tricked by their father into murdering civilians and six years of parasocial relationships with omninet fans has left them traumatized and disconnected from both reality and their sense of self.

LYRA VAN KRAANEN SHE/HER

THE EX

"Twenty years, four sons, my reputation, my career... at long last, haven't I given enough?!"

Lyra Van Kraanen might, with some justice, accuse the universe itself of conspiring to make her miserable.

She devoted her life to the research of NHPs, and the Armory used it for nothing more than another way of turning sentient beings into weapons. The man she married turned out to be a cold, emotionally distant fanatic, so obsessed with his delusion of killing God that he traumatized their children.

She fled the Armory and the man she used to love in spectacular fashion, taking several of his research facility's NHPs with her as she departed. She spent six years in transit, only to discover when she arrived that one of her sons had been killed in a research accident. Odin hadn't even bothered to tell her; she had to find out through backchannels.

She's spent four years in Calliope, estranged from her family, unable to contact her old colleagues, unable to submit new papers. To make ends meet, she was forced to work as a cycle technician. Lyra Van Kraanen, twice shortlisted for the Union Science Bureau's Illumination award, reduced to flipping an on-off switch! *That's* the best job she could find!

And it was only four years, *four years* before the Armory found her hiding spot. Now she's a political prisoner because *someone* in a rival sigdiver clique snitched on her, and joy of joys, her ex-husband is here as well! And to top it all off? That wretched, *obnoxious* Horizon streamer who she feuded with for years, and called a "motherless waste of skin?" Well, you'll never guess who *they* turned out to be!

THE TASK GROUP

On paper, the 4th Harrisons' World, Research task group is the pride of the Armory: a cutting-edge prototype dreadnought, escorted by two tried-and-true line vessels that have served with distinction, a respectable subline complement and several wings of strike craft and mechanized chassis.

But its foundation is rotten. The *Michel Ney*, the Armory's prized prototype and the group's flagship, is barely functional, its suite of experimental technologies constantly pushing its systems beyond their safe limits. Dr. Valentinian's incessant tinkering and "optimization" only makes these problems worse.

The other vessels in the group are tried and tested Armory vessels, and should be the model of naval efficiency. But in an act of petty sabotage, the Steward Council swapped out their regular crews just before the mission, replacing them with a mismatched gaggle of convicts, dead-enders and underperformers. Most of the sailors in this fleet have never worked on the ships they've been assigned to, or even other ships in the same class. These are the dregs of the Armory.

Everyone on this mission is being punished in some way, and everyone knows it. They've been banished to a babysitting job in a miserable backwater system at a time when the Dawnline Shore is heating up and war is a real possibility. They're going to miss the chance for glory and honorable service in the fight against the hated Karrakin, just to babysit some ponce Executive and his squabbling kids while he fiddles with his toys.

Morale is abysmal. Combat readiness is critically low. Shipboard maintenance is poor. Even simple things like adherence to the Armory's military dress code have fallen by the wayside.

PCV-DN *MICHEL NEY*

MICHEL NEY-CLASS DREADNOUGHT

The *Michel Ney* is the lead ship of its class, a new type of dreadnought that will change the face of naval warfare – or so Dr. Valentinian promises. In reality, it has a long way to go before it's ready for active service.

Built around a GMS *Murie*-class battleship, the *Michel Ney* is a testbed for nearly all of Valentinian's new innovations. It's the first known non-Volador ship to mount a blinkspace carver.

So far, Valentinian has only been able to use it to the extent the Volador can while far outside of a major gravity well. Within a star system, he can only move the fleet a few thousand kilometers. This still gives the ship a truly unprecedented level of maneuverability, but what makes it a game-changer is it can extend this gift to others. The *Michel* Ney's entire battlegroup can reposition in the blink of an eye, allowing a level of tactical flexibility unimaginable with prior technology.

Innovation comes at a cost, however; the *Michel Ney* is a technical nightmare. The ship's electrical grid had to be rebuilt from scratch to tolerate the carver's immense power draw. Most of its internal systems are proprietary and use non-standard parts, some of which are little more than improvised kludges by Valentinian's design team. The ship is prone to blackouts, glitches and essential systems failures.

It's also modestly armed for a dreadnought; making it work with *any* weapons loadout was a challenge, and anything complicated or power-hungry was out of the question. It carries a standard long-cycle primary lance that hasn't yet been test-fired, a standard array of kinetics and missiles, and little else.

All of these problems were well known to the Purview; it's why they assigned it to Lord Director Fry as the detachment's flagship. Lord Director Fry finds the ship's incessant technical issues and Dr. Valentinian's presence insufferable, and so spends most of his time on the *Sirona*.

PCV-GC *SIRONA*

FARRAGUT-CLASS STARFIELD CARRIER

In comparison to the constant chaos aboard the *Michel Ney*, the PCV-GC *Sirona* should be a model of naval order and efficiency. Built to the modular *Farragut* template, the *Sirona* has seen many tours of duty in various roles.

This time, it's serving as an escort to a research project, so it's outfitted to support a wide variety of smaller craft – fighters, destroyers, mechanized chassis divisions – along with an entire regiment of Colonial Legionnaires. This expedition might take years, so it's also equipped with the tools for limited in-situ resource utilization.

The *Sirona* is well-armed for a carrier, capable of eliminating subline vessels and even leaving dents in capital ships, but its true power comes from the fighter wings and mounted chassis it can deploy. Theoretically, the *Sirona* should be the most effective ship in the entire system when it comes to dealing with hostile locals – it simply has the greatest ability to project power against smaller targets.

Unfortunately, as an act of petty sabotage, the Steward Council has given Fry a completely untested, untrained crew that's never worked together before and was assembled mostly from low-Social conscripts doing remedial or penal service.

PCV-L *CONSTANCE FAIRVIEW*

ZHUKOV-CLASS FRIGATE

The *Constance Fairview* is assigned to the detachment for active defense and damage control duties. The *Zhukov*-class is an Armory-licensed repackage of the GMS *Superior*-class, and as such fields extensive remote repair and rearmament functionality.

DESTROYER GROUP

SAM BARBER-CLASS DESTROYERS

The PNV *Caleb Wright*, PNV *New Croydon* and PNV *Lycurgus* make up the detachment's destroyer escort. Their primary purpose is to provide a defensive screen against other subline vessels, although they have sufficient firepower to make attack runs on capital ships, should it prove necessary.

BEAT ??:
CALMER CHAMELEON

Departing from Hell's Gate at nearlight, Chameleon can be reached in four hours from an external perspective, but only 25 minutes pass on the ship.

As you drop from nearlight, the cerulean sphere of Chameleon lurches out of the void, along with the much smaller Saeculum. Almost immediately, Siren registers multiple target locks.

"Sirona Flight Control to unidentified approaching vessel, state your intended course and identify yourself. You have five minutes to comply."

"Sirona Flight Control, this is Harvest Gold Zero-Four-Five-One Dragon's Tooth on approach to PCV-GC Sirona, transmitting ident manifest now. We are expected by Sirona Actual. Requesting immediate stand-down of arms and docking clearance, over."

There is a brief, tense silence.

"Sirona Flight Control to Harvest Gold Zero-Four-Five-One, your manifest is satisfactory. Stand-down of arms confirmed. You are being sent vectors for approach and docking on flight deck two. Do not deviate from them without filing a new plan with us beforehand. Sirona Actual has been informed of your arrival. Keep this channel clear."

Siren rolls her eyes. On the viewscreen, you see a hulking carrier flanked by a number of smaller ships and an even larger vessel you don't recognize. Behind them is a space station with a gravity ring surrounding a polyhedron of strange, jet-black material. In the distance, the aurorae of Chameleon shine with frightening intensity, as if the Ghostcrown is angered by the trespassers in its domain.

The PCV-GC *Sirona* is a truly massive vessel, with four cavernous flight decks running the entire length of its fore section. The *Dragon's Tooth* has been assigned a subline docking cradle on flight deck two, right at the back, so as it flies in, the team is treated to a look at the vast array of fighters, subline support vessels and mounted chassis that the Armory brought with it – a purposeful display of military might.

THE WELCOME MAT

The sort of reception the team receives is dependent on the status of the **Calliope Clock**.

CALM (0 TICKS) OR UNREST (1 TICK)

As they disembark, the team are met by a full company of Purview marines, escorting the flag officer of the battlegroup, Lord Director Samuel Fry, and the *Sirona*'s commanding officer, Strike Captain Tsukuda Tani. It's all very austere and formal; the Armory seems to be treating this as a meeting between military officers.

Strike Captain Tsukuda initially treats the PCs in a cool, detached manner; she clearly doesn't approve of them, *per se*, but they're guests of the Lord Director, so she treats them respectfully. Lord Director Fry, on the other hand, is surprisingly warm and welcoming for a member of the Armory's admiralty, and even offers to give the PCs a tour of the ship's non-classified areas.

If the team has arranged a meeting with Fry (or Switch has arranged it for them), he ends the tour in his office. If not, he might still be convinced to grant them a few minutes of his time with a successful skill check, though he's not thrilled about having to rearrange his schedule at the last minute. If the PCs fail, or don't attempt to get a meeting, Strike Captain Tsukuda asks them to come to her office to discuss correct protocol while on board Purview Naval vessels.

If the team has been authorized to visit the Glasscage, they must leave the Dragon's Tooth on the *Sirona* and take a separate shuttle over.

CRISIS (2 TICKS)

If the PCs have waited until now, the Armory is much less welcoming. Even if Switch previously arranged a meeting, Lord Director Fry is too busy to see the PCs.

Additionally, Strike Captain Tsukuda no longer wants to see them either; she had a plan for a false flag operation that would give Lord Director Fry the necessary pretext he needed to declare autonomy from the Steward Council, but her window has closed.

If they want a tour, the PCs might get assigned an ensign or junior lieutenant to show them around the least classified parts of the ship, but other than that, the only reason for them to visit the *Sirona* now is to get a shuttle over to the Glasscage.

INSPECTING THE SHIP

The PCs never go anywhere on the *Sirona* without an escort. This isn't simply a matter of it not being allowed: every single one of them is being watched by someone whether or not that observer is being obvious about it.

Any attempt to sneak about is made at **+2** and **Risky**; even if it succeeds, someone will quickly notice that one less person is present. The Armory is singularly unforgiving about trespassers in restricted locations, and Lord Director Fry will not be amused if the people he vouched for abuse his hospitality.

As the PCs walk around (on tour, or otherwise) they'll get the sense that something is *wrong*, no matter how hard the Armory try to hide it. Discipline is shameful; sailors are flouting dress code regulations, showing sloppy form with their salutes and bad posture while at attention. A lot of enlisted staff look unusually young and green, especially for a posting on a carrier.

The *Sirona* doesn't seem to be getting proper maintenance. The corridors are clean and the entire ship gleams, but there's an odd smell around, as if the air filters haven't been serviced correctly. At any given time, there seem to be technicians running around fixing a myriad of minor faults.

Anyone even vaguely familiar with the Armory will know that the Purview Navy would never normally allow a ship to be in this state, *especially* with non-Armory visitors aboard. A simple punishment detail wouldn't be allowed to look this sloppy in front of outsiders; if anything, it would be held to an even higher standard.

PCs with a good **Read a Situation** or **Investigate** roll will realize that this disarray seems *intentional*, possibly even *calculated*. There's no way they could be seeing this much chaos and disorder by accident; incidents *keep* happening when the team is in just the right place to witness them.

As guests, the PCs will never be openly disrespected by the *Sirona*'s crew, but their opinions on the PCs will be clear nonetheless. If the team looks like a gaggle of scruffy wastelanders, they'll be treated with subtle condescension; if they look like a team of professional mercenaries, it'll be polite disdain; if any of them look Karrakin, it'll be veiled contempt. The Armory respects strength, however, so any PC who carries themself confidently will get much less attitude.

Unless a PC is a member of the Purview military in good standing, they will not be permitted to carry weapons while aboard the *Sirona*. They will be searched several times to ensure compliance – although, curiously enough, not before they enter Lord Director Samuel Fry's office.

SCENES FROM THE *SIRONA*

1-2	A lieutenant reprimands a small group of sailors for their non-regulation haircuts. If a member of the team has sufficiently eye-catching hair, he glares at them, too.
3-4	A damage control team performs a combat readiness drill. From what you can see, they don't seem ready for combat.
5-6	A handful of ensigns move cargo crates from one side of a room to another. If asked what they're doing, they'll reply that they've been assigned to "midships load balancing duty." An experienced spacer will recognize this as a hazing ritual.
7-8	Several sailors wearing hazmat gear climb out of a maintenance shaft one by one, hauling vent crab corpses. An infestation has begun.
9-10	A junior lieutenant is sternly lecturing three sailors about relativity and proper handling of railgun ordnance. He has absolutely no idea what he's talking about, a fact that is painfully obvious to everyone except him.
11-12	In a mess hall, a group of sailors swap stories of their upbringings, homeworlds and previous postings. An awful lot of them seem to involve disciplinary actions, and almost nobody here seems to have served together before.
13-14	A group of Colonial Legionnaires are doing PT in one of the zero-g gyms. The exercise regime looks ridiculously intense, even for combat personnel, and each legionnaire seems to be trying to outdo the others.
15-16	A Barbarossa chassis hangs suspended from the ceiling in one of the maintenance bays, its innards exposed and its signature Apocalypse Rail detached and partially stripped down.
17-18	Two technicians inspect a burnt-out circuit board they've pulled from the HVAC unit in a corridor section. They both agree the magnetic flux from Chameleon's aurorae is causing these issues, but disagree on how to solve it.
19-20	The door to the flight operations center for one of the carrier's fighter wings is open, revealing a scene of chaos. They're in the middle of flight drills, but there seems to be some confusion over *which* drill they're supposed to be running. The commanding officer barks furious, often contradictory orders at her bewildered subordinates.

MEETING WITH SAMUEL FRY

Lord Director Fry's office is far smaller and plainer than one might expect for a member of the Purview Navy's admiralty. Anyone familiar with the layout of Armory vessels will note that, for some reason, he seems to have been billeted in the personal quarters usually reserved for the ship's Executive Officer.

Fry is happy to listen to the team, but he'll be deeply skeptical about certain elements of their story. Ships from the future? Portals that resurrect the dead? They fought a decaying god in a knot of tortured space at the bottom of a mine? This all sounds like the sort of fanciful nonsense Dr. Valentinian would dream up.

If asked why the Armory is here, Fry's answer appears to be a boilerplate response: the Navy is here as a protective detail for Dr. Odin Valentinian while he investigates anomalous spacetime phenomena. In the meantime, Fry has been ordered to arrest a number of fugitives wanted by the Purview justice system and hold them until they can be extradited to Ras Shamra.

Fry, however, obviously disagrees with this entire operation; he won't state it outright, but his manner and choice of works makes it quite clear. He addresses the Steward Council with false deference, paying lip service to their authority while ridiculing their orders.

"I'm sure they have good reasons for commissioning a deeply unpopular fringe-world manhunt from the same task force that's meant to be providing security for sensitive research. They didn't share any with me, but that's their right, of course."

He's fully aware of the widespread discipline problems throughout the fleet, and suspects the entire mission is a plot to sabotage his career, maybe even get him killed. He never backs down from a challenge, though, and revels in the idea of turning a crew of ne'er-do-wells, rejects and ex-convicts into a fighting force that will make the Armory proud. If anyone can do it, he can.

On the subject of Dr. Odin Valentinian, Fry is much less careful with his words. He doesn't trust the doctor at all; to him, the man isn't just a delusional quack, nor a completely unprincipled genius, but the worst of both: a man with the power to impose his fevered imagination on reality.

He's had Odin's ex-wife, Lyra Van Kraanen, arrested on a raft of treason charges, and hopes that holding her will provide some leverage over the doctor. He's right, but not for the reason he thinks; Odin couldn't care less what happens to Lyra, but his children are upset about their mother being in jail, and it's affecting their ability to work on his projects.

As for the Valentinian family in general, he considers it a wasp's nest he wants as little to do with as possible.

"They say nothing teaches you more about a man than his children. Take a good, long look at his kids. What lesson do you see there? If you ask me, it's the kind they build vaults to warn future societies about."

He has no strong opinions on Thor or Tyr, despises Loki due to an incident at a gala some years ago, and while he respected Baldur, he has no idea what to make of their new identity as Switch. Given that Switch is a deserter and has sold Armory secrets to Horizon, he's surprised that the Steward Council hasn't ordered their arrest; perhaps it's a favor to Odin, or perhaps they realize that jailing a figure so beloved by the galaxy's terminally online youth would be bad PR.

If asked about his opinions on the other factions in the system, he has some cautious answers.

THE CULT OF THE ONE

"I'll admit they have some impressive parlor tricks, but I've seen paracausal phenomena before. Clever theatrics doesn't make them servants of God."

IMPACT DYNAMICS

"Steele's the worst kind of man – a petty little tyrant who craves power, but lacks the cunning or charisma to be a real player. People like him aren't dangerous on a galactic scale, but the problem is they know that, and it makes them even more abusive locally."

THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

"Ah, our perennial foes. I don't know what they're doing here, but I'm not surprised to find them blockading an innocent world – par for the course, no? Don't trust them, and don't underestimate them – particularly not their Fleetmaster. Lady Hayyan-Reyes is no pampered socialite. She's the sort of admiral they'd write songs about, if she let them."

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

"SSC doesn't send Skyhooks and board members to fix minor problems. Whatever's happening here is important to them, and that's never good news for anyone caught in the crossfire. If you have to deal with them, be careful. SSC doesn't pose and bluster like the Armory does. They put a knife in your back when you're looking the other way."

Throughout the meeting, Strike Captain Tsukuda Tani is sitting quietly, watching the PCs, assessing if they're the kind of people that can be trusted to keep secrets. If she decides they are, she demands their presence in her own office after the meeting with Fry is done, using the excuse of instructing them about proper protocol while they're on Purview Naval vessels.

A COVERT ASSIGNMENT

Whether it's after meeting with Fry, or directly from the hangar bay, Strike Captain Tsukuda has been looking for an excuse to talk to the team privately. When she's quite sure they're alone, she reveals her true intent.

The Strike Captain's quarters occupy an entire deck of the ship, and are absurdly opulent: marble floors, five-meter bronze statues of Harrison II, vaulted ceilings, genuine oak paneling, real leather, gold trim. There's even a grand piano and a wet bar. It should be instantly clear, even to those that aren't familiar with the Purview Navy, that these are not the trappings of a Captain – these are Admiralty quarters.

This conversation doesn't happen if the **Calliope Clock** is in **Crisis** (two segments ticked); by then, the repairs on the Cult's missile corvette are complete and it has returned to service, so it can't be stolen. Strike Captain Tsukuda no longer has a use for the PCs, so she doesn't bother talking to them.

"I'm going to get straight to the point. The Steward Council think I'm one of their loyalists. They're wrong; I support the Lord Director's vision for the Armory. But he lets the Steward Council push him around, too afraid of reprisal to risk openly defying them. He's too timid, too compromising. I'm not.

"To wit: the Council have decided to force the Lord Director into an absurd pissing match with Calliope by mandating he arrest fugitives who fled here. That would be bad enough, but one of them is Lyra Van Kraanen – our lead scientist's ex-wife!

"There's an Armory protocol known as Nonstandard Crisis Directive Alpha. It states that, quote, 'in the event of a continuing threat to Armory assets in a foreign theater by a force of unclear disposition, wherein timely reinforcement is unavailable, the ranking officer in the theater may assume direct command of all local assets and take action usually reserved for the Armory's central executive.'

"Let me put it simply. If the battlegroup came under attack, Lord Director Fry would be able to freeze out the Steward Council and act on his own authority. He could pardon the prisoners we've been forced to round up. He could also deploy our full military might to aid your efforts against the Cult.

"The problem is that the Cult's aware of this, and are giving us a wide berth. They don't want to give Fry the slightest excuse. So, I propose this: we solve two problems at once. We engineer our own crisis by freeing a bunch of prisoners. Fortunately for us, there's a bunch of locals already camped out above our prison camp. We've suspected they might try something reckless – just give them a little push."

WHY US?

The Strike Captain can't trust anyone within the battlegroup. The Steward Council gave her a list of their plants, but she can't be sure it's complete; she wouldn't put it past them to secretly plant agents to make sure other agents are doing their jobs properly.

On the other hand, the Lord Director has a lot of loyalists, even in this sorry crew. It would be easy for them to misinterpret Tsukuda's actions as an effort to frame him. He'd be obligated to relieve her of command, and the Steward Council would replace her with an *actual* loyalist.

"I'll be up front with you. If you screw this up, I'll deny all knowledge of your actions. And I'll be able to – the Steward Council might be suspicious, but they'll believe me over a bunch of outsiders."

PRISON BREAK

"The priority for me here is to ensure that I lose as few soldiers and support staff as possible; ideally, none. Trashed equipment can be replaced or written off, but the less letters of condolence I have to write to grieving families, the better.

"The Warden himself, though, he's a different story. It would be bad enough if he were just a gleeful sadist, but he's also inept, negligent and completely unable to take responsibility. I'm not telling you to kill him – I'm just saying if it happens, it happens."

DISCIPLINE ISSUES

"The Steward Council set Lord Director Fry up to fail by crewing his ships with the dregs of the Armory. It won't work, though; he'll get them back in shape."

OSTENTATIOUS QUARTERS

"Oh, these aren't supposed to be mine. These are Admiralty quarters, meant for the Lord Director. The Steward Council billeted me here instead; some childish effort to humiliate him, I guess. It didn't work, of course – he got my bunk, and just said the lack of frippery suits him better. I can't help but agree; gods and spirits, this place is impractical!"

WET BAR

"Sure! I don't drink and I'm not paying for it, so take whatever you want. Just don't share it with the crew; discipline is bad enough already."

BEAT ??:
THE GLASSCAGE

When studying anomalous spatial phenomena, Armory field research guidelines prescribe a specific type of prefab facility: the Glasscage. It can be shipped to a site in pieces and, if accompanied by a competent construction crew, assembled in a matter of weeks.

The structure consists of three sections: first, an outer ring which contains docking, habitation, administration and recreational facilities as well as the station's power, life support and engineering departments. It also holds various low-risk research wings and reference libraries. This ring rotates independently of the rest of the structure to produce gravity. The majority of the station's staff work on this ring, and do not have clearance to venture further into the structure.

The second section is an EM-shielded, stationary inner ring which holds various mid-clearance labs and the station's central mainframe in a zero-g environment. Only properly-cleared researchers and members of the Admiralty are supposed to be allowed into the inner ring, and only for their assigned departments. Odin has given the PCs unlimited access, in clear violation of Armory protocol.

The third and final section is the titular Cage: a central icosahedral containment structure built from the Armory's patent "Nullstone." This revolutionary metamaterial is an almost perfect insulator, blocking not only all EM radiation but almost all forms of causal and paracausal interference as well. The Cage is designed to perfectly contain any anomaly the Armory might be interested in researching, while minimizing the danger to the rest of the universe.

The Cage is dedicated to direct data gathering and experimentation on the Anomaly, and only members of Odin's inner circle are permitted to enter. This includes his core research team, their security detail and his children (even Switch, though it's unlikely they'll take him up on this offer). However, he's happy to break the rules and let the PCs in as well if he thinks they'll be useful allies. After all, who's going to stop him?

No Glasscage could be described as "normal," but Odin's eccentricities have made this particular station even stranger. Odin made extensive changes to the layout of all three sections of the station. He claims they're mathematical optimizations to decrease travel time, but those familiar with *feng shui* or other forms of geomancy will note that the layout seems to be a highly advanced application of these disciplines.

It goes deeper, however: the entire facility is a grimoire. Unbeknownst to anyone other than Odin and his family, every single square inch of the Cage's Nullstone plating has been mechanically etched with one-millimeter-deep inscriptions: liturgicode, passages from religious texts, arcane diagrams and sigils, wards, abjurations, blinkspace equations, astrological maps, mathematical formulae, each and every piece flowing into and incorporating the next. HORUS occultists would weep with envy, if only they knew.

Odin, despite his professed love of science, is indulging in a strange sort of mysticism, mixed with a heavy dose of game theory: he's wagering that magic is real. If it's not, he hasn't lost much by performing these odd rituals. On the other hand, if magic is real, he's gained a serious advantage over those who don't practice it.

Whether from Odin's dalliance with magic or proximity to the Anomaly, the Glasscage is – for want of a better description – *haunted*. Gravity, space, time, probability and causality don't always work right. Corridors have too many corners. Objects fall along unlikely trajectories. Clocks run slow, fast, or display impossible times. Six one-in-a-billion events occur in the space of an hour. Researchers wake up to discover details of their lives aren't the same as they remember them.

This has generated something of a feedback loop: inexplicable things happen around the Glasscage, which inspires more intensive and daring research, which causes more inexplicable things to happen. Odin has discovered it's possible to "agitate" the Anomaly by bombarding it with gravitational waves; whenever he does, there's a sharp uptick in strange phenomena across the station.

LIFE ON THE GLASSCAGE

The Glasscage is a stark contrast to the *Sirona*. While the Armory carrier paints a thin veneer of discipline over disarray and incompetence, the Glasscage is a place that seems chaotic at first glance, but is highly ordered in its own way.

Each day brings a flood of strange new phenomena, but in such volume that its residents have become inured to them. Waking up to discover that gravity has inverted, your watch gains a second every hour and three different versions of you have already clocked in for work is no longer terrifying or even bewildering; it's just another day at the office.

Every so often, a general alert will sound, followed by an announcement with a Greek letter, a numeric code and a color – "Epsilon-032-Blue" or "Tau-182-Red," for instance. In order, these codes list the location, type and severity of the incident. Later letters in the alphabet indicate higher-clearance areas, and colors closer to the red end of the spectrum indicate higher severity. There are jokes about the inevitable "Omega-999-Infrared" event, but they're never told above a whisper.

Despite the bizarre chaos of the Glasscage, there's a sense of composure that's lacking from the rest of the Armory detachment. Nobody is here on a punishment detail; Odin got to hand-pick his team from volunteers, and had all the Dawnline Shore's best and brightest to choose from. People know what they're supposed to be doing and how to do it.

Field research projects like this one can last years, so the Glasscage is well-stocked with amenities. From the highest-clearance research teams to the janitorial staff, everyone working here enjoys a level of luxury and comfort that few outside of the Executive class could expect anywhere else in the Purview. There are restaurants, bars, cinemas, gyms, spas, arcades – all Armory-branded, of course.

At first glance, people who've had experience with Purview society might be surprised by how little Armory Social comes up. It won't take them long to realize that there's little need for it here: nobody gets a posting like this unless their Social is spotless.

Residents of the Glasscage will politely ignore the PCs unless they have specific business with them. They're likely to be seen as Dr. Valentinian's personal visitors, and nobody else's business.

SCENES FROM THE GLASSCAGE

1-2	A scientist slowly drifts towards the ceiling as gravity inverts in one particular spot. He doesn't seem alarmed; in fact, the way he casually tilts his coffee mug to prevent spillage suggests he's used to this.
3-4	An office wall is covered entirely in analog clocks. They all display different times, and some of them even seem to be ticking at different speeds.
5-6	Three researchers are locked in a furious argument over the answer to an equation on a nearby whiteboard. You hear aleph-null being referenced in regard to someone's mother, and the next thing you know, a fistfight has broken out.
7-8	A lab technician is busy repairing a mass spectrometer, aided by what appears to be three duplicates of herself. One of them looks up, sees you, and abruptly vanishes along with two others. The remaining technician glares at you, marches over to the door, and pulls the blind shut.
9-10	Every object in an office has begun to float a few centimeters above whatever surface it was sitting on. A scientist is excitedly taking notes and snapping photographs; she is also floating.
11-12	A Sunzi teleports from one side of a testing chamber to the other. Seconds later, an identical Sunzi appears next to it. One of the attending scientists sighs and radios for a "duplication resolution team."
13-14	A senior researcher reprimands a number of technicians who were trying to play a tabletop roleplaying game, reminding them that use of dice is prohibited outside of the Probabilistics Lab. As if to illustrate why, all of their four-sided dice are standing perfectly on their points.
15-16	A specialist administers a Balwinder-Bolaño test to a research NHP. They seem to be scribbling an awful lot of notes, and they look more and more concerned each time the NHP answers a question.
17-18	A whiteboard in a breakroom depicts some kind of office pool on the cause of the next alert. The most bets are for "GRAVITY INVERSION," with "TIME PARADOX" as a close second and "FIGHT" trailing third.
19-20	A young woman with extensive cybernetic augmentation across the right side of her body approaches, introduces herself as Soyeong, and asks where in the hell she is. She's booked to perform at a concert in two hours, and this isn't Cixin Ward.

DR. ODIN VALENTINIAN

Odin is a man who loves the sound of his own voice, and happens to be an excellent public speaker. He can and will talk for hours on almost any subject with little preparation. Depending on what they ask him about, the PCs may struggle to get a word in edgeways.

It should be noted that among all three of the new major powers in Calliope, and even among Harrison Armory, Odin is the only person who *immediately* believes the PCs when they say they're fighting a god who can resurrect its fallen followers. They do not need to justify themselves or even provide evidence; Odin believes them the moment they say it, and volunteers his help in solving the problem – so long as they do him a favor.

"I'm going to put this bluntly. I want you to liberate my ex-wife from the detention center the Armory have built on Umbra. Please don't presume that I do this out of sentiment; her incarceration simply represents an unacceptable distraction for my children, and I would like you to end it.

"I don't care how you do it; I'd suggest employing the assistance of the rabble who've been protesting above the prison. I have it on good authority that they've recently come into possession of a dossier full of classified intelligence on the facility."

Understandably, the PCs probably have questions.

IS THIS A TRAP?

"You're meeting me unarmed in the center of my research facility. If I wanted you dead, I have no end of better ways to do it; simpler methods with fewer points of failure. I can't say for certain that it's not a trap, but it's not one I laid."

STOLEN DOSSIER

Odin is the source of the leak; he left the document lying in front of Switch during their meeting on Hell's Gate. If the PCs haven't talked to Switch yet, Odin doesn't mention how he knows that the Flotilla received the document, and doesn't share that information unless pressed heavily on the subject. If the PCs have already talked to Switch, they may have heard that they "stole" it from Odin. He disagrees.

"Do you really think I'd carry a dossier of highly classified intelligence into a meeting with Switch and leave it unattended by accident? No, I wanted them to have it. Honestly, if they haven't realized that, I'm disappointed. I expect better from them."

EX-WIFE

"Lyra was an NHP specialist. We met at some symposium or other, and I respected her passion for her field of study. I don't resent that she left me; she could've done it without stealing my research NHPs and selling classified documents to Horizon, though."

REWARD

"Your reward is my assistance in understanding your enemy. I will discern the nature of this nascent god, and then create a weapon capable of destroying it. I will employ every resource at my disposal towards this end. What more could you possibly ask for?"

But the PCs can easily cajole more out of him.

"What is it that you want? Trinkets? Experimental technology? The fruits of my life's research? Very well. I'll give you my Project GUNGNIR prototype – it needs field-testing anyway."

Blinkspear

`Main Melee, Exotic Gear, AP, Thrown 5, Unique, 1 SP`

`[⛭2] [1d6⌀]`

If you throw this weapon, you may retrieve it as a **free action** on your turn, no matter where you are, even if you're **INTANGIBLE** or not on the battlefield. This is the only method by which you may retrieve this weapon other than the method described below.

If you **teleport** or are **teleported**, and the Blinkspear is not in the same space as you, you may change the destination to the space it occupies instead of your original destination as a **reaction**. Doing so retrieves the Blinkspear.

Odin named it "Gungnir," because of course he did. It's not precisely the godslaying weapon he promised, but it's a start.

OTHER SUBJECTS

BLINKSPACE

Odin has dedicated his life to studying blinkspace, and is delighted to discuss it. Blinkspace is difficult to comprehend, because it operates by an entirely different set of physical laws to realspace. Attempts to observe blinkspace frequently return conflicting results. Researchers have variously described it as a zero-dimensional non-volume with no fundamental forces, a self-intersecting 11-dimensional manifold, an endless expanse of dark clouds above and below illuminated from the side by an unseen source of light, and other even stranger natures.

"Tyr perceives the manipulation of blinkspace as a continuously cutting blade. Loki and Switch perceive it as unfolding the branches of an infinitely complex tree. I myself perceive it as a self-intersecting fractal, rotating at terrifying speed."

Odin won't mention Thor unless specifically prompted.

"Oh, Thor doesn't visualize blinkspace manipulation at all. He's capable of it, but he considers it only in strict numerical operations, which is… limiting."

THE SUNZI

The *Sunzi* is Odin's most successful project to date. He freely admits that it's based on reverse-engineered technology stolen from the Volador, but he's proud of it nonetheless. Integrating that sort of technology into a military chassis was no mean feat; making that chassis remotely functional as a war machine was a serious accomplishment. The Sunzi *will* revolutionize mech combat; if you need evidence, he says, just look at SSC pursuing a similar utility with the Mourning Cloak, or the Royal Karrakin Foundries Calendula.

THE MICHEL NEY

Defensive technology in space warfare is always going to be at a disadvantage. The Armory's current doctrine dreadnought, the Louis XIV, is an admirable effort in this regard, but all the Baronies need to do is build a bigger gun, and they'll be right back where they started. Odin proposes a different paradigm: if you can't roll with the punches, don't be where they land.

THE ANOMALY

Odin finds the Anomaly fascinating. It's unlike anything he's ever seen: despite having an event horizon, its gravity well extends only a few meters. It emits radiation at such a perfectly constant rate that his most sensitive instruments haven't measured the slightest variance. He has many hypotheses, but no working theory – yet.

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Odin has little to say on the Karrakin. Although it seems absurd to call it a coincidence, they set off thirty years ago – decades before he decided to come to Calliope.

SMITH-SHIMANO

Odin thinks the answer to SSC's presence is perfectly simple: they want to steal his vastly superior blinkspace technology. The Mourning Cloak's EX Slipstream Drive reportedly has a nearly 3% failure rate, wherein the mech is delayed in rematerializing, or fails to do so at all. SSC's understanding of blinkspace is decades behind his own, so they're trying to steal what they can't research honestly.

THE FIRE GATES

Odin is fascinated by the Fire Gates. He considers himself the galaxy's foremost expert in blinkspace technology, and yet, confronted with the Fire Gates, he feels as if he knows almost nothing at all.

"I'd like nothing more than to study an intact, working specimen. Perhaps you could help; the insights gained from it would be beneficial to both of us."

FEATHER'S CONDEMNATION

"I assure you: I really did consider whether it might be true. I even implemented additional precautions regarding the Anomaly!

"But have you considered that Feather might be… in error? She's an NHP, and I don't bring that up merely because she's in deep cascade. I mean that NHPs can't exist without blinkspace. If, in this hypothetical future, it had been 'destroyed' so thoroughly as to prevent travel or communication, it would also collapse the parallel space within a casket.

"Additionally, unless there's something fundamental that I don't understand about blinkspace – and I'm open to that possibility – I don't think it's something you can… 'destroy?' It's an emergent property of the universe; the idea of 'destroying' it is as nonsensical to me as 'destroying the number three.' Erase the number all you want," he says, holding up three fingers. "I'm still holding up that many fingers."

MISTREATMENT OF CHILDREN

"Do you want to waste time moralizing with a person who already knows he was a monster to his offspring, or do you want to do something useful?"

There is a Door here.
The Other Side of the Sky.

THOR VALENTINIAN

Odin doesn't trust Thor with anything important other than all-access security clearance, and even that's just for appearance's sake, so he's been left to his own devices. For want of something to do, he's taken up the study of anthropology, and can usually be found in one of the outer ring's libraries, working on his thesis.

Thor is kind and sensitive, but withdrawn and guarded; the world has a tendency to take his friends from him, so he's slow to make new ones. He often struggles with depression, ennui and a sense of purposelessness, not helped by his father's neglect. He works under the assumption that people will find him and his interests boring and quickly tire of speaking to him, and tends to self-sabotage in conversations and relationships.

"Oh, you're the pilots who saved Switch and Loki from the Cult. Nice to meet you in person."

HIMSELF

Thor thinks he's uninteresting, and so generally tends to deflect questions about himself onto other people he's associated with.

"Not much to say, really. You've met my dad, right? Smartest blinkspace researcher in the galaxy. One of my younger siblings is an omninet sensation. Kind of hard not to live in their shadow. I, uh, took up studying cultural anthropology recently, I guess."

HIS FAMILY

Thor is bluntly honest about his relatives. He has seen enough of the world to know that this isn't how normal, functional families work, but he has a sense of gallows humor about the whole thing.

"I was the eldest child, and a huge disappointment to dad. I got to watch him fail at fatherhood three more times until mother walked out, got to see the first of my brothers become a spiteful wreck, the second a rebel and the third a corpse – at least, until they came back unrecognizable. Normal eldest child stuff, you know?"

ODIN

Despite everything, Thor respects his father's intellect, and just about nothing else.

"Dad's a genius. Probably the smartest man you'll ever meet – and I don't say that out of affection; it's just the truth. Any question you ask about blinkspace, he'll have the answer. But spend time with him and you'll quickly see how being a genius doesn't necessarily make you a better person."

LYRA

Just like Odin, Lyra had a favorite child, and it wasn't Thor. Thor loves her nonetheless.

"I'm really worried about what they'll do to her if she's extradited back to Ras Shamra. I know Loki and Ba-… Switch are too. Tyr pretends not to be, but I can tell as much as he's furious with her, he doesn't want her to be executed, or to spend the rest of her life in some Armory detention center. I keep begging dad to do something, but he never listens to me."

TYR

Thor has a strained relationship with Tyr; they're the only two brothers to remain with Odin, but they're not exactly close.

"Dad thought the world of Tyr – for a while. Then he started having social development issues, and dad dropped him like a sack of bricks. He's never recovered from that. I care about him, but I don't know how to help him."

LOKI

Thor and Loki respect one another, and probably have the healthiest relationship of any of the siblings.

"Dad got Loki and Baldur as part of a matched set, and decided he didn't need a spare. I guess Loki decided the feeling was mutual. But as much as he didn't want to take after dad, I guess they both needed Baldur a lot more than Baldur needed them."

SWITCH

Thor has conflicted feelings about Switch: there's some lingering resentment from the old days, and he sees their current behavior as immature and irresponsible, but he's still overjoyed to learn that they're alive.

"Still getting used to the name. To me, they were Baldur, the golden child, you know? The only one dad actually needed, as he never tired of reminding us. I see they still have to be the center of the universe; guess some things never change."

SAMUEL FRY

"I think he might be the only Armory high-up who's ever expressed genuine interest in my opinion. I admire both his conviction and his caution; too much of one or the other gets people killed."

THE FLEET

"Feels like the Armory rounded up all the people it despises the most and shipped them off somewhere they can fail quietly without embarrassing the rest of the Purview. I can relate to that."

There is a Door here.
The Unfavorite.

TYR VALENTINIAN

Tyr was supposed to be Odin's Sunzi pilot for direct experimentation on the anomaly, but when they arrived in system to discover that Loki and Switch were both present, Odin dropped him like a sack of bricks. He was relegated to a desk job, overseeing day-to-day administration of the Glasscage. Understandably, for a man whose psyche was shaped by sudden paternal rejection, he did not take this well.

Most days, Tyr can be found brooding in his office. He has been drinking heavily as of late, and is likely clutching a glass of whiskey whenever the PCs happen to talk to him – even if he's supposed to be on duty at the time. Being drunk makes Tyr speak his mind with no filter, which tends to make things awkward.

"You're that local mercenary crew, aren't you? I'm sorry you had to shoulder the responsibility of bailing out my feckless younger siblings."

LYRA

Tyr feels just as resentful towards his mother as his father. After all, she picked a favorite just like his father did, and it also wasn't him.

"Well, my mother turned out to be an irresponsible traitor with no loyalty to her family or the Armory. HE was always her favorite. I suppose it should be no surprise that he turned out the way he did."

Tyr does not elaborate on who "he" is (it's Loki).

THOR

Tyr treats Thor with a sort of deeply patronizing pity. It quickly becomes clear that of his three siblings, Tyr resents Thor the least, but that might be because Thor never had anything that Tyr wants.

"You know, he should count himself lucky, in a way? Father never loved him. He didn't have all that much to lose. There's bliss in ignorance, isn't that how the saying goes? And I suppose I should thank him for being mediocre. Father wouldn't have decided to roll the genetic dice again if he'd been satisfactory."

HIMSELF

Tyr portrays himself as a forlorn hero, as if he's the protagonist of a Shakesperean tragedy. It could easily be mistaken for melodrama, but for what it's worth, Tyr is being sincere.

"I met every metric of father's obscure calculus! I was mastering the equations he gave me by the age of four! I outpaced Thor's athletic development! He turned his back on me anyway! It's my lot in life to be cast aside. I should've told him to go and fuck himself a long time ago! Why didn't I? Why didn't I?!"

LOKI

Loki is a conversational landmine. The mere mention of his name drives Tyr into a resentful fury, and likely ends the conversation.

"Ah, the prodigal child! No surprise at all that we found him dossing around on the Icebreaker, living a life of luxury on father's credit line with no respect to the duty it conveys! But the moment father found out he was here, he couldn't WAIT to replace me! It's the twins! It's ALWAYS the FUCKING twins!"

With a shriek of rage, he hurls his glass against the wall, where it shatters into a thousand pieces.

SWITCH

Tyr tries to act contemptuous and dismissive towards Switch, but it's clear that he's envious – after all, Switch actually had the guts to escape when their father went too far. Tyr wished he had found that strength. He still refuses to call Switch by their new name, though.

"Ah, yes, Baldur! The perfect child! The unconquered sun around which all our hopes revolve! Well, we all saw how that turned out, didn't we? They ran away, faked their own death, even stole father's prototype! Serves him right for giving up on me."

ODIN

"Don't. Just don't."

THE FLEET

Tyr has a low opinion on the state of the fleet, and will go into great detail about their slovenly flaunting of the Naval Code, as whiskey slips from his glass and splashes on his desk.

HIS DRINKING

"Don't judge me, you pompous prick!"

CALLIOPE

"Well, I'm not going to lie, it's a hellhole. But you know where you stand in a hellhole, so there's that."

THE GLASSCAGE

Tyr actually has a whole lot of useful information about the Glasscage. Since Odin fobbed off most of the station's busywork on him, not only can he answer any question the PCs care to ask, he likely will. In particular, he's one of the few people who knows Odin turned the Glasscage into a grimoire. If the PCs let him, he will go on for hours about his father's interest with the occult.

There is a Door here.
Things Lost to Fenris.

LOKI VALENTINIAN

Odin's managed to drag Loki back into his orbit for one last job. Do this final favor, he promises, and Loki and his twin are free forever. Loki's not sure he believes it, but he knew that if he refused, Odin would most likely try to drag Switch back instead.

Loki's job is simple, in a way: pilot one of Odin's prototype Sunzi chassis, and use its suite of blinkspace manipulation tools on the Anomaly exactly as his father instructs him to. Loki's smart enough to know that Odin is up to something, but if it will get him what he wants – freedom from his father – he'll do what he's told.

"If we keep running into each other like this, people are going to start talking."

THOR

Thor and Loki may just have the healthiest relationship out of any two members of their family.

"He's a good guy, right? He's kind, clever, humble, one hell of a serve in tennis – any other father would be proud to have him as a son. He just wasn't good enough for the one we got."

TYR

For a person so reasonable and compassionate about the rest of his family, Loki seems to have serious issues with Tyr. Everything he says about him is acidic and condescending; it's uncomfortable.

"Tyr? Yes, a prime example of how much father can mess you up. I guess I can't blame him for the way he acts. Hell, if I were in his position, I'd probably be drinking myself to sleep and pointlessly lashing out at everyone too. Perfectly understandable that someone with issues that serious would make other peoples' lives hell for no reason, isn't it?"

HIMSELF

Of the entire Valentinian family, Loki is the most well-balanced and clear-headed at the present moment, at least when it comes to himself.

"You know, strangely enough, I think I had it the best of all of us. Father had Baldur, so he didn't need me, and quite frankly, I didn't need him either. It was only after Baldur was gone that he suddenly realized he had no fallback plan. I had no intention of stepping into that role; there was nothing he could offer me.

"That's what changed, if you must know. He finally found something I want that he can dangle over my head: actual freedom."

SWITCH

Loki's outlook on Switch depends on whether they were reconciled during the Prelude. If they weren't, Loki is bitter and resentful towards Switch.

"I think we've already said everything that needs to be said about them, didn't we?"

If they were, Loki speaks kindly towards Switch, and if the PCs aren't already aware, he tells them that Switch is hanging out on the protest flotilla above Umbra.

"Clever, isn't it? Using their celebrity and status as the child of an Executive to shield the Flotilla from Armory action. Just the kind of trick I'd pull."

ODIN

Out of all of Odin's children, Loki has perhaps the most piercing insight about his father.

"You have to understand that father was there during the Black Throne Incident. He was ten years old, and he watched the Temperate Palace burn with his own eyes, saw Deimos in the sky, lost Harrison II and both his parents, all in an hour. Then he spent a week wandering the surface of Ras Shamra, surviving on scraps. And then every single adult in his life lied to him, told him he hadn't seen what he saw. That'd be enough to mess anyone up.

"The most dangerous thing about him isn't that he's clever, or manipulative, or amoral. The most dangerous thing is that he's a true believer. He has this… insidious way of making you see things from his perspective. You start to understand him, maybe even sympathize with him. You start to believe all the evil he does is absolutely necessary."

LYRA

Loki was Lyra's favorite child, and that made it all the more painful for him when she departed. Nonetheless, Loki is deeply concerned for her.

"If I hadn't promised father I'd help him with his experiments, I'd probably be plotting a jailbreak."

THE SUNZI

"What can I say? It's a delicate machine built to make the impossible happen. Sometimes, when I jump, I feel like I've been gone for years, like I've been to places and seen things as if they happened differently, to different people. Other times, it feels like not enough time passes, like I've stepped across space… faster than instantly, if that makes even a lick of sense?"

There is a Door here.
Hail, O Lord Of Mischief.

BEAT ??:
THE FLOTILLA

Ever since the construction of Coldwater 484 became publicly known and the arrests began, a slowly-growing fleet of civilian vessels has been keeping a vigil in orbit over Umbra.

They haven't been able to *do* all that much so far; if they so much as engage thrusters for attitude correction, local Armory forces begin pointing guns at them. The one time they laid in an intercept course for an incoming prison barge, the dreadnought hovering over Saeculum pinged them with a targeting laser bright enough to scorch the nose art off their flagship.

For weeks, the flotilla has sulked, feeling increasingly powerless as more and more people are whisked off to the prison camp below. The Armory has issued repeated warnings to leave, but hasn't made any effort to enforce them; a clear signal that they don't think the protestors are a threat.

But now, a "mysterious benefactor" has dumped a treasure trove of intelligence straight into their laps. It has blueprints, threat assessments, personnel rosters, equipment manifests – the flotilla knows everything. Name a cell block, and the action committee can tell you how many guards will be on duty at the present moment, what their names are, what gear they'll be carrying – hell, they could probably make an educated guess what they had for breakfast.

The benefactor may not be so mysterious to the PCs: Dr. Odin Valentinian. Demonstrating just how easily he can manipulate his children even after years apart from them, he left a dossier in full view of Switch during his visit to Hell's Gate, knowing full well they wouldn't be able to resist getting one over on him. Switch took it straight to the flotilla, just as Odin planned.

For the past few days, the flotilla's action committee has been deliberating over what to do. They have to act soon, before the data becomes obsolete, but they still lack the confidence and strength to stage an assault.

The arrival of the PCs has changed that. The flotilla is full of outlanders, labor unionists, citizens of every major settlement in Calliope, perhaps even some members of the Hell's Gate militia, and many of them were inspired to take action by the team's heroism.

"Listen. You guys took on the Circuit and won. You took the fight to Impact Dynamics and won. You killed Andros Capella twice. We can't win this alone. But with you? With you, we can't lose."

THE ACTION COMMITTEE

Like many organizations in Calliope, the Flotilla is anarchist in structure; there is no official hierarchy and no single leader. The Flotilla's agenda is set by mutual agreement by its action committee. This has some advantages and disadvantages; on the one hand, the committee has to agree on a course of action before doing it, which is often almost impossible. On the other hand, the sharing of power makes it hard for Armory infiltrators to sabotage.

CALLIOPE LABOR CONGRESS

As with most major social movements in Calliope, the trade unions were first to the floor. The immense effort of the unions has made much of this project possible, and the immense effort of a couple of union bosses has kept it from falling apart.

Regardless of the situation in the system, Teka Ashenafi is here, playing the role of the adult in the room. He makes sure that the committee doesn't fall apart due to internecine squabbling. He's perfectly able to multitask, however, and is still making sure Jerry is treating the workers on Hell's Gate right.

If Rita is still in charge of the Icebreaker, Fayad Harb is aboard the Flotilla. Whatever grudge he had with Teka is ended, and they've settled into a carrot-stick routine; Fayad makes a fine carrot, and Teka a great stick. If Rita was ousted, Fayad is too busy campaigning for the position of station director.

THOUSAND HABS IRREGULARS

As with the previous spate of abductions, the first people to suffer the Armory's arrests were from the Thousand Habs; those settlements too small and poor to defend themselves. This, however, was the final straw. Between these mass arrests, the chaos in the system and Rodericke Steele's price-gouging on food, the Thousand Habs have suffered enough indignity.

If **Chapter 7: The Famine King** (p. ###) hasn't yet been completed, many of the Thousand Habs Irregulars are busy helping Howl plan her assault on Impact Plaza. However, if it's been completed, they are free to assist the Flotilla – and they do so in droves.

GUN BROTHER TEN

Gun Brother Ten can be found leaning against a wall near the hangar bay, whistling his signature tune to himself. Talking to him reveals that one of his other wards is currently incarcerated, and even his legendary skills aren't enough to rescue them alone.

PIRATE SYNDICATES

Calliope's two remaining major pirate organizations are both concerned by the Armory's actions, but can't spare anything. The Knights are too busy fighting the Cult and preparing for Howl's attack on Impact Plaza, and most of the Forge is stuck on Asphodel due to the Karrakin Deputation's orbital blockade.

If **Chapter 7: Why I'm So Cool and Popular** (p. ###) is complete, Mistress Elske has dispatched a small band of Knights led by Claryana Rowdley (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. ###) to assist the Flotilla.

If **Chapter 8: Ballad of the Twin Lords** (p. ###) is complete, the Blacksmith is free to dispatch one of the Forge's larger subline vessels and a squad of veteran mech pilots to assist the Flotilla.

THE SIGDIVER CLIQUES

The threats posed by the Cult, the Armory and the other newcomers in the system have driven all of Calliope's sigdiver cliques to declare an indefinite truce, so that they can face threats to the system as a unified front.

To this end, DRIVETRAIN, the self-appointed leader of HORUS operations in the system, has sent thirteen of his best sigdivers to help the flotilla, with local Horizon cells contributing seven of their own. In particular, The Truth have sent Striga Von Aldenberg as their representative; while the Flotilla is having trouble getting used to her eccentricities (particularly her insistence that the Armory is a front for the Time Vampires), none question her hacking skills.

ASPHODELIANS

One of the few major upsides of the Karrakin presence above Asphodel is that Harrison Armory has so far been unwilling to risk looking for fugitives there, either in Furnace City or the Terra Solus. However, in the aftermath of the Battle of Fort Cerberus, a number of outlanders were stranded off-world when the Deputation showed up. With little else to do, they fell in with the Flotilla, seeing a wrong that needed righting.

The Asphodelian contingent is led by Samantha "the Coyote," who the PCs might have met at a Terra Solus sparring field (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. ###). The few Cityfolk present have deferred to her leadership.

THE BIG SIX

Aside from exceptions listed above, the presence of protestors and support from the Big Six is quite weak, given that all six of the system's largest settlements are currently dealing with their own crises.

Hell's Gate hasn't made much of a contribution; its miners are hard at work furnishing the materials necessary for the system's war effort, and the militia are busy defending them. Besides, if the PCs are visiting, the Gate's most effective military asset is already here.

Three Sisters has its own problems. If SSC hasn't been dealt with yet, people are afraid to leave the station; if the situation's been resolved, they're still cleaning up.

Protestors from Endymion's Lament are conspicuously absent. This is partly because there have been no arrests on the station, and partly because the Armory is buying fuel from them.

```
Comrade_Cormorant: hey guys endymion's lament here we're the socially conscious station we won't sell fuel to disgusting autocrats like rodericke steele please trust in our moral conviction we only sell fuel to ethical and scrupulous businesses like *checks notes* harrison armory

                                        -  Muse chatter
```

The Icebreaker Borealis' contribution to the Flotilla has mostly been bored, wealthy tourists who want to feel socially responsible. Some enterprising scumbag sold tickets for, quote, "an immersive social consciousness experience – a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be part of a genuine proletarian uprising," and almost a hundred people showed up. The Flotilla was hours away from expelling the whole group until one of them turned out to be a licensed trauma surgeon.

IPSWICH DELACEY

Switch is playing to an audience; not just their followers, but the PCs and the Flotilla as well. Doing the right thing is incidental to *being the hero of this story*. They'll say whatever it takes to make it seem like their actions are righteous; that most of what they're saying is true is nothing more than a happy coincidence. There's an uncomfortable echo of Odin in Switch's behavior.

Switch is filming almost every second they're awake. The PCs will usually find them interviewing members of the Flotilla, speaking directly to their audience, or running a promo for one of their many sponsors. While Switch has never been great at opsec, they have enough presence of mind to make sure any discussion about sensitive information happens off-camera.

"Hey, what's up, lancers?"

THEMSELF

Switch will always try to position themself as the hero. If they've done wrong, then it was a necessary evil forced upon them by circumstances beyond their control. To be fair, in some cases this is entirely true; in others, however, they will manipulate facts or outright lie to make things fit their narrative.

"I never asked for any of what's happened to me. I'm just trying to take control of a life I've never had any say in before. Dad and the Armory never gave me a choice; I'm not letting them do that to anyone else."

THE GLASSCAGE

"It radiates dad's smug, unpleasant energy – literally, if you believe the rumors."

THEIR FAMILY

"They're all here. Hell of a reunion. Not really how I expected it to go. Not how I wanted it to go, either."

ODIN

"I trusted dad. I let him put me and my brothers through hell for years because despite everything, I trusted he would never hide anything from us. I was loyal because I at least thought he was honest. I found out even that was a lie. I'd defended him for fucking nothing!"

Odin is a gigantic sore spot for Switch. While they do have a point that Odin's meddling with forces beyond his understanding is dangerous; the problem is that their personal feelings on the matter cloud their judgement. Often, while trying to explain the danger posed to Calliope by their father, Switch will become distracted by an unrelated personal grievance.

"You know we had to take stims just to cope with his training? I had a Juice habit at the age of twelve. When I first arrived on Hell's Gate, I had to get used to a new life while going through withdrawal!"

LYRA

Switch's feelings on their mother are conflicted. On one hand, they care for her much more than their father; on the other, Switch clearly has lingering abandonment issues. Regardless, they still want to rescue her from Coldwater 484.

If the PCs explain that Odin hired them to rescue her, Switch assumes it's a trap, unless the PCs explain that Odin only cares about the productivity of his sons. This makes sense to Switch – Odin never helps anyone unless it's in his own interest to do so.

THOR

It's clear Switch doesn't think about their eldest brother much; they have some generic nice things to say about him, but very little else.

"Thor? Yeah, Thor's a decent guy. Solid."

TYR

Switch's outlook on Tyr can be summed up in two words: overwhelming pity.

"You might've noticed that dad fucked all his kids up, but I don't think anyone got it worse than Tyr. Thor never met his stupid fucking standards, right from the start, but Tyr got it worse. Dad doted on him for a while, but eventually ditched him, and it destroyed him. Worse, he keeps trying to prove himself to dad, and every time he does, he gets hurt again."

LOKI

Switch's feelings on Loki depend on whether the PCs helped the two of them reconcile after their argument. If they're still angry at one another, Switch does at least try to keep their feelings off-camera.

THEIR SHIP

Switch is uncharacteristically tight-lipped about what's on their ship, and will ignore questions about it.

THE JAILBREAK

To their credit, Switch cares about liberating *everyone* the Armory has arrested, not just their mother. Less to their credit, it's partly because they want to look heroic. They also have an interesting revelation:

"That dossier about the prison the Flotilla got? I gave it to them. Stole it from my dad; he has no clue!"

If they've already talked to Odin, the PCs might know that Odin is aware of the theft, and in fact planned for Switch to steal it. Switch isn't receptive to being warned about this; they will deflect onto a different subject.

ASSAULTING THE PRISON

The dossier Switch stole from their father has almost everything the Flotilla needs to enact a successful jailbreak – from access codes to weapon inventories, from floorplans to tactical assessments, it's all there. It's so convenient as to be suspicious.

Still, the Flotilla can't pass up this opportunity. At some point during their visit, the action committee summons the PCs, and Teka Ashenafi briefs them.

"Alright, we've assembled a plan of action. There's a coded message that can be sent to the Armory dreadnaught to start a power systems test, which will put it out of action for at least twelve hours. If we time this for when Chameleon is between both moons, we'll have a window of between four and six hours without interference from the Armory fleet.

"Once on the ground, you need to take out the anti-orbital guns, then hold down the complex while we evacuate the prisoners. Speed is crucial; we've got to get down, load up and get orbital again before the Armory arrive, or this was all for nothing."

Switch chimes in. "What about my mom? We gotta get her out, too."

Teka holds up a hand. "That shouldn't be an issue. We've got breach teams prepared to pull people out of the Secure Housing Unit. Now, here's the plan…"

STAGE ONE: NEUTRALIZE REINFORCEMENTS

The most critical part of the plan is ensuring that it's executed before Armory reinforcements can arrive. Even with the PCs, the flotilla stands no hope of victory against the might of a fully-equipped Armory carrier, let alone a dreadnought. Working around this threat will require precise timing, efficient action and inside help.

Odin has arranged for a covert signal the flotilla can send to warn him that the raid is about to take place. He will perform an unscheduled test of the *Michel Ney*'s power systems, taking the battlegroup's primary source of long-range firepower offline and requiring oversight from the *Constance Fairview*. This will leave only the *Sirona* and the destroyer group to answer the prison's distress call.

If done at the correct moment, when Saeculum and Umbra's orbits put Chameleon between them, this will give the flotilla a critical window of between four and six hours. During this time, Coldwater 484 will be without support; even at a high-G burn, the battlegroup will have to maneuver around the planet.

STAGE TWO: BREACH THE FACILITY

Attempting a landing inside the prison complex is too risky while the facility's point-defense guns are still active. The team will have to deploy outside the perimeter and breach the walls. Initial resistance is likely to be low, as the flotilla's presence has led the Armory to focus most of their defensive capability on the skies instead of the ground.

STAGE THREE: TAKE CONTROL

Once the prison's point-defense is offline, the flotilla can begin landing and extracting prisoners. The PCs needn't concern themselves with escorting individuals; the flotilla's irregulars will handle that. What they will need to do is to lock down key chokepoints to ensure prisoners have a clear path to the evacuation ships.

STAGE FOUR: BREACH SECURE HOUSING UNIT

Lyra Van Kraanen is being held in the SHU, the facility's secure housing unit, otherwise known as "solitary" or "the hole." The flotilla intends to liberate all the prisoners who've been locked up here, but if the PCs want to rescue her in particular, the irregulars are happy to assist.

STAGE FIVE: EXFILTRATE

Once Lyra Van Kraanen is safe and the prison is empty, the PCs will exfiltrate aboard the *Dragon's Tooth*. By this time, Captain Mercedes Ordaz will have brought the UNS-CV *Thames* into orbit of Umbra. While she can't provide direct military assistance to the jailbreak, she can screen the flotilla's vessels once they've lifted off with prisoners aboard.

INFILTRATING THE PRISON

There is, of course, another way into Coldwater 484: getting sent there as a prisoner. It's getting out again that will be the real trick.

STAGE ONE: FORMULATE ESCAPE PLAN

Before they get themselves locked up, wise PCs will work out an exit strategy. This means that they need to find a way to get their mechs smuggled into the prison, and a way to get out of the cell blocks so they can pilot them. The intelligence in the dossier that Switch stole from Odin will be critical.

If **Chapter 7: Why I'm So Cool and Popular** (p. ###) is complete, Impact Dynamics can simply hide the mechs inside a food shipment bound for the prison.

STAGE TWO: GET ARRESTED

Getting arrested might be more difficult than the PCs assume. Despite the stereotypes, the Armory won't throw someone in jail just because they ask. The team will need arrest warrants in their names – or in the names of people they can easily pass for.

If they've already talked to him, Odin can help – he's an Armory Executive, so falsifying arrest warrants for a handful of border-world lowlifes is worrying simple. Strike Captain Tsukuda Tani can do something similar, but they'll need to convince her they've got an exit strategy. Otherwise, the team might need to actually commit crimes for which the Armory would arrest them.

The Armory aren't stupid; they'll become suspicious if the PCs suddenly surrender themselves for arrest (or start committing arrestable crimes) immediately after visiting Lord Director Fry, Dr. Valentinian or the Flotilla.

They might get sent to the SHU immediately (see **Beat: Hard Time**, p. ###), as the Armory correctly assumes that they're infiltrating the facility in aid of a prison break.

Once they've hashed out all the specifics of their plan, it will be time to execute it and see how much of it – if any – survives contact with the enemy.

MISSION:
WHITE WHALE

My child arrived just the other day
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it, and as he grew
He'd say "I'm gonna be like you, dad,
"You know I'm gonna be like you!"

– Henry Chapin,
Cats In The Cradle

BRIEFING

The Harrison Armory taskforce would be an extremely powerful ally in the fight against the Cult. Unfortunately, they're currently too busy rounding up dissidents and meddling with forces beyond their comprehension. The key to solving this issue lies either with a reformist admiral, or an egotistical blinkspace scientist and his severely dysfunctional family.

GOAL:	Convince Harrison Armory to help the system. End the petty feud between Dr. Valentinian and Lord Director Fry. Help Switch fix their broken family.
INTEL:	Zero-g combat likely; Harrison Armory fields well-equipped mechs in large numbers**; AP** damage and the ability to inflict the **SHREDDED** condition will pay dividends; wide-area weaponry will also be also useful. Expect enemies with access to **burn** damage and **teleportation** abilities.
STAKES:	Lord Director Fry and Dr. Valentinian will both endanger the system in their own way if they're not talked down.
REWARD:	Lord Director Fry has promised to put his entire military complement behind Calliope's war effort. Dr. Valentinian claims he can build a weapon that can kill Feather. Switch will be happy.
PROBLEMS:	Failure will likely piss off Lord Director Fry, Dr. Valentinian or both; Harrison Armory are a bunch of egotistical, sneering imperialists; have you *seen* Switch's family? Christ, what a *mess*.

DETERIORATING CONDITIONS

CALM (0 SEGMENTS TICKED)

The Flotilla has just received Switch's dossier, and is still deliberating on what to do with it. They'll call the PCs for assistance, but are willing to wait if there are other urgent matters in system. Odin lacks a test pilot, and so has not yet begun full-scale experimentation on the Anomaly.

Strike Captain Tsukuda Tani begins looking for a way to freeze the Steward Council out of Lord Director Fry's decisions, and hits upon the idea of a false flag attack.

UNREST (1 SEGMENT TICKED)

More and more "persons of interest" are being sought by the Armory. In addition to official Armory raids, unscrupulous bounty hunters have started to hunt people. Suspicion and distrust plague the system.

Loki, acting as Odin's test pilot, attempts a 2.8 second "excitation" of the Anomaly. An arbitrarily large number of other Lokis in nearby timelines conduct the same experiment, briefly causing their local spacetimes to overlap. The effect reaches as far as Umbra and the Flotilla, and everyone exposed to it briefly experiences dozens, hundreds or even thousands of other timelines in a wave of vertigo, dissociation and false memory. Switch identifies this as Odin's work immediately.

The action committee and Switch both send the PCs separate, urgent appeals for aid. The window for Captain Tani's false flag attack is rapidly closing, so she falsifies a request to meet from Lord Director Fry and sends it to the team.

CRISIS (2 SEGMENTS TICKED)

The Armory publicly posts a list naming thousands of "persons of interest," ordering them to immediately surrender to a Purview official, and threatening any station that impedes them. Panic grips Calliope.

Odin pushes Loki to attempt a much longer 37.32 second excitation. This allows Odin enough time to search for a signal from his alternate self, but before he can lock onto it, the shielding on Loki's mech fails and he's forced to shut down.

The effect once again reaches Umbra, but this time the Flotilla is not so lucky – thirty seconds of temporal dissociation is enough to cause several serious injuries and three fatal seizures. The Flotilla sends another urgent request for help, but Switch, frustrated with the PCs' inaction, sends an ultimatum: either they show up to fix this, or Switch will fix it themselves.

The window for Captain Tani's scheme has now closed, and she now has no use for the PCs.

??? (3 SEGMENTS TICKED)

A dozen conflicting agendas clash above Chameleon as everyone makes their play at once. Dissatisfied crewmen attempt a mutiny against Lord Director Fry, Captain Tani attempts a purge of Steward Council loyalists, the Flotilla launches an assault on the prison camp, Odin enacts his final experiment and Switch seeks revenge for years of emotional abuse.

Switch launches an assault on the Glasscage as Loki attempts a seven-minute excitation. Switch and Odin's mechs brawl in the test chamber and fall into the Anomaly, catastrophically destabilizing it. Spacetime begins to collapse around Chameleon as timelines collide. Multiple versions of the Armory fleet appear, and someone starts shooting.

Loki, with the assistance of several other versions of himself, attempts to reverse the calamity, but quickly realizes he can't do it himself. He sends a desperate call for help, but Hell's Gate now has other problems…

BEAT:
THE THIRD PILLAR

THE PLAN
THE OTHER PLAN

Alternatively, the PCs might have either decided to infiltrate the prison or gotten themselves arrested by failing **Arc: Framing the Guilty** (p. ###).

BEAT ??:
HARD TIME

The PCs might have struck upon the idea of intentionally getting arrested to infiltrate the prison – or simply gotten caught up in one of the Armory's mass arrest sweeps because of existing warrants.

ARRIVAL

The intake process wasn't actually as humiliating as you'd expected. They weren't exactly gentle with you – it's the Armory, after all – but they kept it at least somewhat professional.

After your vital details are taken and you've been assigned your standard-issue orange jumpsuit, you're greeted by a smug man flanked by a squad of twelve heavily-armed correctional officers. He glances back and forth between you and a slate, mentally taking note of your details.

"Well, I have to offer my congratulations. Whatever you did caused such a mess that the Purview has no idea what to charge you with. In any case, you'll be here until we can ship you back to Ras Shamra to stand trial.

"In the meantime, welcome to Coldwater 484. I'm the Warden – just the Warden to you, you don't need to know my name! Life here can be easy or it can be hard, and that choice is entirely up to you. And before you get any amusing ideas, let me make something clear to you: nobody escapes Coldwater 484."

The Warden takes a personal interest in the PCs, and insists on escorting them to their cell block personally – backed up by a heavy guard presence, of course.

On the outside, the Warden appears steadfast, a strict disciplinarian possessed of steely resolve and a scary level of insight into his prisoners. In reality, like most of the others assigned to Calliope, he's at the end of his rope. A breakout at a Dawnline penal complex occurred on his watch, and the Armory thinks he's inept.

Unlike a lot of people here, the Warden is smart enough to recognize that he's been set up to fail, and the stress of this situation manifests as a cold, methodical cruelty towards anyone unfortunate enough to be nearby – especially the PCs.

LIFE ON THE INSIDE

Life in Coldwater 484, it turns out, is not as horrible as one might fear – the Armory has to abide by the Utopian Pillars just like any other Union member state. Detaining people this way already skirts the boundaries of the Third Pillar, and even terrorists aren't worth risking an intervention from the DoJ/HR.

The facility consists of a central administrative complex and three cell blocks, each of which is itself divided into six housing units (sometimes referred to as "pods"). Each cell block has its own mess hall, laundry and low-gravity gymnasium, while each housing unit has its own media center and common room.

Life in the facility is heavily regimented. Although the rotation of Umbra takes almost seven days, a 24-hour day is simulated, and inmates are allowed out of cells only between 06:00 in the morning and 21:00 at night. Meals are served at 07:00, 12:00 and 20:00 hours. Due to Umbra's fairly low (0.4g) gravity, inmates are required to engage in at least an hour of physical exercise every day to maintain muscle mass; each housing unit has their exercise hour at different times.

However, within these restrictions, inmates are largely left to their own devices. Most notably, nobody here is forced to work. Food, laundry and maintenance are all automated, and for most of the day, inmates are free to wander about the common areas and the media center, so long as they don't cause trouble. Each housing unit's media center has a reasonable selection of movies and games, although media in any way critical of the Armory is notably absent.

The guards are terse and unfriendly, but tend to leave inmates alone unless they're fighting or sneaking into places they shouldn't be. They don't fear an uprising or an escape; individual cell blocks can be physically isolated from the rest of the facility by depressurizing the access corridors.

Inmates that are violent, disruptive or considered to be "politically or strategically sensitive" are removed from general population and sent to the Secure Housing Unit, usually referred to as "the shoe," "the hole" or "the basement suite." If a PC repeatedly causes trouble, it's likely they'll end up here. The SHU is much more restrictive, with prisoners being kept in their cells most of the day, although these cells are larger and contain necessary hygiene, media, communications and exercise equipment to satisfy Union regulations on long-term individual detainment.

A FAMILIAR FACE

For some reason, Anthony "Cal" Callahan is here. He's unsurprised to see the PCs, and is inexplicably calm

about being locked up in an Armory detention center. If a PC talks to him, he asks if it's their first time in jail; if they say yes, he gives them a basic rundown of how to act and what to expect.

Most days, he can be found in the common room, dealing blackjack (pays 6 to 5, dealer must hit on a soft 17). Since there isn't any regular currency in this prison or anything you'd need it to make purchases with, bets are usually made with slips of paper.

If a PC can be trusted not to snitch (and Cal *will* know), he can give them access to a truly astounding array of contraband. Sometimes he isn't seen on the block for days at a time; if asked him about this when he returns, he remarks only that he "went to replenish his stock." He takes payment in promised favors (and he *will* call them in), but he'll work for free if someone can win seventeen hands of blackjack in a row.

If asked about Cal, the guards will just reply "who?" If the PCs somehow gain access to prisoner records, they will note that neither Cal nor his inmate ID number appears in the system.

I WANT MY PHONE CALL

Placeholder

BLACKMAIL

It's possible the PCs might have made a recording of Strike Captain Tsukuda requesting the false flag attack. Although this might be hypothetically useful as leverage, it's difficult to employ correctly.

If it's made public, the recording will cause problems for the Steward Council, as they had explicitly put Tsukuda in this role to spy for them, and the recording will say as much. As eager as they are to get rid of Lord Director Fry, even they realize that trying to discipline him for a false-flag attack their own double agent tried to stage wouldn't be a good look.

The Strike Captain is well aware of the danger such a recording poses, but also can't do much to help the PCs. They were caught engaging in an armed attack on Armory property; releasing them with no justification would be highly suspicious.

ESCAPE FROM COLDWATER 484

Breaking out of Coldwater 484 should be impossible, but it's not. It's staffed by the dregs of the Armory; a lot of these people might be in an Armory penitentiary themselves if they hadn't opted for military service. Nobody wants be here, and discipline is slipping despite the Warden's best efforts.

Even worse, the Steward Council arranged for the facility's construction to be sabotaged, leaving serious and embarrassing holes in its security. They plan to blame any ensuing incident on Lord Director Fry's "gross incompetence."

Prisoners are tracked using electronic tags in their clothing; the Utopian Pillars prohibit anything intrusive like an implant or a collar. There's a lot of security cameras, but none in places with the expectation of modesty such as the showers or toilets. This means that a prisoner can appear to be standing still simply by disrobing. This isn't particularly useful in and of itself, but what if there's a guard nearby to provide a convenient change of clothes?

The guards are also tracked electronically, but the Central Security Office doesn't really care about deviations from patrol routes unless the Warden is watching. People in Central generally assume that anyone who's away from their patrol route is skiving off to smoke or do a line of Kick.

On-duty guards are supposed to check in over the comm system every ten minutes, but it'll usually take a couple of missed calls for Central to notice. The prison's wireless network is spotty due to its hasty construction, and there are dead zones where radios are known not to work.

Guards are attentive enough to notice prisoners whom they personally recognize walking around in guard clothing and raise the alarm, but this is only a problem inside the cellblock you were incarcerated in; guards tend to get assigned to one specific cellblock, and won't recognize prisoners or guards from a different one.

The prison is supposed to have a biometric security gate system that would require a handprint scan to allow passage. However, several vital components were missing from the prefab package, and print authorization to replace them is tied up in red tape. In lieu of this system, each guard carries a physical keycard that allows them through the gates.

There are few reasons for a prisoner to be outside their cellblock. All of them (visitation, interrogation, face-to-face consultation with a lawyer, trip to the warden's office, etc.) would have been scheduled in advance and require the presence of at least two guards escorting each prisoner with an appointment.

Placeholder

Where the PCs need to go next depends on their exact escape plan.

STEALING ARMORY MECHS

If the PCs are willing to pilot mechs other than their own personal rigs, they can steal mechs from the Armory's hangar. If they do this, a PC may choose to pilot any Harrison Armory mech, and equip it with any weapon or system from its own license without the **AI** tag (there are no NHPs available), along with any GMS mech weapon, general market system or flight system.

Usually, if a PC doesn't have the requisite license levels in a mech they're piloting, they are permanently **IMPAIRED** and **SLOWED**, as they lack the correct training and neural interface drivers. In this case, however, most of the facility's staff aren't certified either, and the mechs have been placed in Compatibility Mode; the PCs can pilot them without penalty.

In either case, equipment and frames from **LICENSE LEVELS**, **RESERVES** or **EXOTIC GEAR** are unavailable at this time. They do still have access to any equipment granted by their **Talents**, such as the customized weapon from **ENGINEER**, the Ammo Case from **WALKING ARMORY**, or their personal NHP from **TECHNOPHILE**. Have the players describe how their characters retain access to this equipment.

ASSISTANCE FROM IMPACT DYNAMICS

If the PCs sought assistance from the recently-formed interim government on Impact Plaza, the station delivers their mechs to them inside a food shipment. This only gets the mechs onto the landing pad; the Armory will most assuredly find the hidden mechs if the team don't get to them first. The Plaza will make sure to let them know what time and date the shipment will arrive, but actually getting to the landing pad to take possession of the mechs is entirely up to the PCs.

SIREN'S ASSISTANCE

If the PCs were arrested after failing **Arc: Framing the Guilty** (p. 84), Siren ditched from her rendezvous point and went to ground in the inner system, taking refuge at an asteroid habitat owned by Horizon. She has been gearing up for a daring rescue mission ever since.

She has had Horizon reprint the PCs' mechs, along with orbital drop pods that can safely deliver them to a planetary surface. After making modifications to the *Tooth's* fusion drive to hide its identity, she has discreetly informed the Flotilla and set out towards Chameleon. With no organics aboard, she can burn at upwards of 15g with no risk.

Her plan is audacious in its simplicity: she will simply not decelerate until she's very close to Umbra. At this point, she will burn as hard as her engine can tolerate and slow down enough to fire the drop pods, which will handle the rest of the deceleration themselves. Just before she strikes the surface of the moon, she will initiate a nearlight bolt back towards the inner system to refuel, cool her drive and then bolt back to pick the PCs up once they've fought their way free.

She's relying on the Flotilla to get the PCs to their mechs; that's the one part of the plan she can't control.

"The Armory's traffic monitoring has picked up a Sunfish Mk. III clipper, similar to the one you own, pulling an extremely hard burn towards Chameleon. Its transponder is off and we don't recognize its drive signature. Even more concerningly, it hit the halfway point of its journey more than sixteen hours ago, but has not yet started to decelerate. At its current velocity, it will reach Chameleon in less than a day.

"You're going to tell me everything you know about this ship, and you are going to tell me right now."

Placeholder

One of the other prisoners in your housing unit pounds on the door of your cell. "Get out here! Your name is on every single comm console in the block!"

The moment you get to a console, you see Siren's face. She takes a split second to register that it's you, and then yells two words:

"MARINES! FASTBALL!"

The view switches to a camera drone, fired from the nose of the Dragon's Tooth. You can see the ship plummeting towards the surface of Umbra at a terrifying pace, engines towards the ground, dumping every single air-to-surface missile in its arsenal along with several larger objects which you identify as orbital drop pods.

Doing the math in your head, you realize that with her current inertia, there's no way she can slow down in time. She'll hit the ground at hundreds of kilometers an hour, unless… no. No way. She can't possibly mean to…

*"**BRACE!**"*

Even in Umbra's impossibly thin atmosphere, the sound is indescribable. The sheer force of the shockwave rattles the cellblock so much it knocks you off your feet. Everything not nailed down goes flying. Your ears ring, almost loud enough to silence the alarms now wailing throughout the complex.

Damn, and you thought nearlight bolts were scary on the inside.

DEVELOPMENT

There is one small advantage to this whole debacle: one way or another, the anti-air guns are down. If the PCs facilitated their own escape, they are able to trash the emplacements from the ground in their stolen or smuggled mechs. If they waited too long and Siren had to bust them out, this was accomplished by the missile barrage that she unleashed while on final approach.

Either way, the Flotilla now has no need to send assault teams to take down the guns. The PCs may skip **Combat: Into The Clink** (p. ###) and proceed straight to **Combat: Failure to Communicate** (p. ###).

COMBAT 6.1:
INTO THE CLINK

SITREP:	Gauntlet (*Lancer*, p. 271)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 VETERAN ENGINEER**	Arsenal, Power Deployer, Deadly, Hardened Target
	1x **T2 BARRICADE**	
	1x **T2 SEEDER**	Hopping Mines
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 SPACER SENTINEL**	Gravity Rifle
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 SNIPER**	
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ELITE SCOURER**	Flash Lens, Supercharged
	1x **T2 SNIPER**	
	1x **T2 GRUNT ASSASSIN**	
FOR 4 PCS	+1x **T2 SPACER SUPPORT**	Remote Cloud, Sealant Trap
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 SPACER SENTINEL**	Gravity Rifle

DETAILS

If the team are launching a direct assault on the prison from the outside, they will need to break through its perimeter walls. The flotilla has deployed several other fireteams to launch simultaneous assaults, forcing the Warden to split his defense forces between them. However, he recognizes that the PCs are the largest threat, and has sent a stronger force to deal with them than the other assault teams.

All combat on Umbra functions under the **Low Gravity** environmental condition: mechs count as flying when they **BOOST**, but must land after they move, and characters never take damage from falling.

The perimeter walls of the prison are ramped, allowing defenders a clear line of fire on anyone attempting to scale them. At the top of the ramp, there are several fortifications, one space high and three spaces long, that provide **hard cover** for defenders. Unlike a regular Gauntlet sitrep, there are only two **ingress zones** instead of four, both at the top of the wall.

There's not *supposed* to be any cover at the base of the ramp; this part of Umbra is almost perfectly flat and smooth. However, in clear violation of Armory best practices, a lot of construction equipment was left lying around after work on the prison was finished; this provides **Size 1** and **2 hard cover**.

The initial defensive team of the **ENGINEER**, **BARRICADE** and **SEEDER** should spend the first round setting up a defensive line forward of the objective zone, positioning their mines, turrets and cover cube to cut off the fastest route the PCs have to it. This will force them to make some hard choices when the reinforcements show up.

Placeholder – Sniper.

The **GRUNT ASSASSIN** likely won't spend more than a single turn alive, so make it count. Place it in an Ingress Zone close to players, and don't bother with **ASSASSIN'S MARK** – run in with standard move and **LEAP** on a target with low **AGILITY**, and then attack with **HEATED BLADE**.

The **ELITE SCOURER** should be as mobile as possible on its own turns; it will need to be close to make proper use of **FLASH LENS**. Since it has **SUPERCHARGED**, try to target an enemy with **RESISTANCE** or high **ARMOR** to open them up to attacks from other NPCs.

If the **SPACER SENTINEL** is present, use its high speed and **GRAVITY RIFLE** to pull vulnerable characters out of position. If you can get behind the PCs and pull one of them off the objective, it will divert their attention.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

If the PCs can't break through the defensive line, it will fall to one of the other assault teams to disable the anti-air guns, and this will take more time. The Flotilla will be unable to provide any reinforcements or support during the next fight. The PCs lose access to any **RESERVES** they're not already carrying on their mechs.

PC VICTORY

Having breached the Armory's defensive line, the PCs are free to take down the anti-air guns however they wish. This allows the bulk of the Flotilla to land safely.

DEVELOPMENT

Placeholder

BREAK-IN

"You walk uninvited into MY house, bearing weapons of war, in some pathetic attempt to help criminals escape justice? I'm beginning to suspect that the sorry state of this system can be blamed on an utter lack of morals. No matter, though…"

The Tokugawa twirls its charged blades, which begin to glow with heat.

"Once I'm finished with you, I think Calliope will welcome a little discipline."

BREAK-OUT

"Oh no. Stop right there. I thought I made myself very clear: I said nobody escapes Coldwater 484. I MEANT nobody escapes Coldwater 484 – least of all you. If you didn't understand that? Well, perhaps I didn't explain myself clearly enough."

The Tokugawa twirls its charged blades, which begin to glow with heat.

"Let's give it another try."

COMBAT 6.2:
FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

SITREP:	Control (*Lancer*, p. 268)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **THE WARDEN** – **T2 ULTRA BERSERKER** Harrison Armory Tokugawa	**Chain Axe** deals ϟ instead of ⌀ **Berserker:** Harpoon Cannon **Ultra:** Repulsion Field, Sight, Supreme Melee
	1x **T2 ARCHER**	Hail of Fire
	1x **T2 BASTION**	Fearless Defender
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 OPERATOR**	Skirmisher, **remove** Self-Erasure
	+1x **T2 SPACER SUPPORT**	Sealant Trap
FOR 5 PCS:	**ARCHER:** Add **COMMANDER** template and **QUICK MARCH** trait.	
	+1x **T2 BASTION**	Fearless Defender
	+1x **T2 SCOURER**	Emergency Vent, Melt

DETAILS

With the prison break in full swing, the PCs must maintain control of the facility's internal systems long enough for all the prisoners to get to the flotilla's evacuation ships. Standing in their way is the Warden, whose career and personal pride are both on the line.

The fight takes place around the prison's central administrative hub, which is a large hexagonal building. All combat on Umbra functions under the **Low Gravity** environmental condition: mechs count as flying when they **BOOST**, but must land after they move, and characters never take damage from falling.

At close range, the **WARDEN** is a lethal foe; because of **SUPREME MELEE**, he can attack twice per turn with his **CHAIN AXE** (reflavored here as a charged blade) and gains **Accuracy** on all melee attacks, making him more likely to score critical hits, deal bonus damage and inflict **SHREDDED**. His **REPULSION FIELD** also severely punishes anyone who he gets close to, and **SIGHT** ensures that no miscreant escapes his gaze.

However, he's very weak to long-ranged enemies if he can't close the distance; if he gets **SLOWED** and can't remove the condition with **JUGGERNAUT**, it will turn off his movement options. His only ranged attack is **HARPOON CANNON**, which deals meager damage and is useful mostly for pulling enemies into melee.

AGGRESSION makes it dangerous for players to end their turn next to him, but also for a **BASTION** to protect him – the trigger isn't optional, and if the Bastion is the only adjacent character, the Warden will vent his frustrations on them.

"You useless simpleton! Do better!"

The Bastions won't use **FEARLESS DEFENDER** to assist the Warden if he only has two or less **STRUCTURE** remaining – nobody here likes him, and they certainly aren't willing to die for him if the fight looks like a lost cause. In this case, they'll prioritize using it to protect other allies still on the field, and begin retreating.

The **OPERATOR** is an experimental mech on loan from the Bifrost Initiative. Its pilot will attempt to stay well out of range of the PCs, sniping from safety. It doesn't explode when it's reduced to 0 HP – instead, it merely activates an emergency recall device and **teleports** away. If it's unable to **teleport**, it just leaves a wreck.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

If the remaining correctional officers manage to regain control of the prison's systems, they initiate a lockdown and depressurize the access corridors, cutting off the escape route for any prisoner not already in the transfer module. With time running short before the Armory's reinforcements arrive, the Flotilla has to dedicate all their resources to rescuing stranded prisoners before the Armory recaptures them.

If the team's mechs are still combat-ready, they can still go to the SHU and rescue Lyra Van Kraanen, but the Flotilla cannot help them; any **RESERVES** that depend on the Flotilla will be unavailable. If they want to try, initiate **Combat: (In)Secure Housing** (p. ###).

Placeholder – roleplay opportunities:

- Meeting with and directing prisoners
- Liasing with the flotilla
- Switch shows up

- Warning about incoming Cult ships

LYRA VAN KRAANEN

ARREST

"Someone snitched. Not sure who; I've never told anyone in the system who I was, so someone must have worked it out on their own."

SWITCH

"You know, sometimes I feel like the universe has it out for me – like I can't make any choice that doesn't blow up in my face. I can't even dislike a Horizon member for being loud and obnoxious without them turning out to be my long-lost child."

```
Comrade_Cormorant: No this is just too fucking
funny

Comrade_Cormorant: God0fMischief, number one
Ipswich DeLacey disliker, was their mom the
whole fucking time and she didn't know it

DRIVETRAIN: least coincidental calliopean
immigrant story

                              -  Muse chatter
```

RESCUE

"HE sent you? To rescue ME? No, you must be mistaken. Last thing that man would ever do is risk anything for me, least of all his career."

But if the PCs explain *why* Odin wanted her rescued:

"Right, of course, of course. He wants the kids to shut up and stop complaining. Classic Odin."

ODIN

"If you can believe it, he wasn't always this bad."

She does not elaborate.

BEAT ??:
THE TIMEWAVE

Whether the PCs sprung Lyra from prison or helped Strike Captain Tsukuda with her false flag attack, Dr. Valentinian uses the distraction to initiate the final stage of his experiments on the Anomaly.

A towering wave of stimuli assaults you, obliterating your senses. You feel as if you see through a thousand eyes at once, then a million, then a trillion. Your mind is stretched thin across an endless sea of images, voices, iterations.

If you played **Beat 22: The Hall of Mirrors** (*In Golden Flame Act 1,* p. 222), you will have the answers your player characters gave to a number of questions asked of them within TRIPLE-POINT's metavault – images and impressions of who they thought they were, who they feared they might become, who they could have been, who they wish they were.

Now, bombard them with those images.

For a full minute, the PCs are overwhelmed by incomprehensible, conflicting sensations – sensory data from an infinite number of other timelines. For every possible choice they have ever made, there are infinite iterations of themselves whose life was changed because they made a different one.

IMMUNITY

Curiously, certain frames and systems confer total or partial immunity to the effects of the Timewave:

- Characters in a **Sunzi** are immune, as Odin built it with this exact sort of situation in mind.
- Characters in a **Minotaur** are immune, as their cockpit is outside of linear time.
- Characters in a **Calendula** can avoid the effects by using **GRAMMATON CLOAK**.
- Characters who have the **LESSON OF TRANSUBSTANTIATION** core bonus automatically phase out of reality until the Timewave is over – even if they're not in their mech at the time.
- Characters in a **Mourning Cloak** aren't affected if they used **BLINKSPACE JUMP**, rolled a triple and vanished during the last fight.
- Characters with the **FADE CLOAK** system can shift into the Firmament to avoid the effect.
- **Lich** pilots experience something, but it is likely far more chilling: every single one of the infinite iterations they perceive is *also* in a Lich.

In general, any other frame or system not mentioned here (for example, from other third-party supplements) that can manipulate time, blinkspace or the Firmament will likely be able to avoid, mitigate or alter the effects of the Timewave. Use your best judgement.

REACTIONS

Placeholder – Samuel Fry, Switch, Odin all at once

"The odds are nonzero but not statistically relevant."

LORD DIRECTOR FRY

Lord Director Fry has already had a very bad day – whether it be from "Cult" attacks on an outlying helium refinery, or from a flotilla of locals attacking the prison camp he specifically advised against building. Now, to top it all off, the scientist he's been assigned to babysit is attempting to shatter spacetime.

He doesn't care if the PCs were leading the raid on the prison camp. He doesn't care if the PCs were actually the ones behind the attack on the helium refinery. He doesn't even care, in fact, if the PCs were literally caught raiding the helium refinery, sent to the prison camp and then helped all the prisoners break out of it. It's clear to him that the PCs are a bunch of violently deranged mercenaries with loose morals, which is precisely what he needs right now.

"This is Lord Director Fry, to the fireteam out of Hell's Gate! I have invoked Nonstandard Crisis Directive Alpha, and am exercising emergency powers to resolve this situation! Dr. Odin Valentinian, the lead researcher on this project, has gone rogue – this experiment was initiated without my consent, and is now endangering the stability of local spacetime. I'm deputizing you – you have full sanction to resolve this crisis by any means necessary. In return, I can promise full amnesty for any other fugitive from the Armory!"

DR. ODIN VALENTINIAN

Dr. Valentinian has just completed a proof-of-concept, proving that the greater experiment he wants to conduct is possible; he has absolutely no intention of surrendering, nor of allowing Lord Director Fry to shut him down by force.

"Hell's Gate fireteam, this is Dr. Odin Valentinian. Ignore the Lord Director; I'm conducting an experiment whose results will be vital to your war effort against the Cult. I require your assistance in securing the Glasscage against the forces Fry has dispatched. Consider that the Steward Council has committed themselves to sabotaging Fry at every step; they won't honor any deal he makes. I am the only member of this deputation with whom they'll negotiate in good faith, but only if I get results."

SWITCH

Switch is, understandably, quite upset with their father, and cautions the PCs against trusting him. Less understandably, perhaps, they're also gearing up for an armed assault on their father's research complex. However, that's not even the biggest problem right now: something is *very* wrong with Switch.

"Lancers, don't trust a fucking word he says! He's a snake who'll use you for whatev–"

Switch's tirade is cut off as their face distorts violently, splitting into a writhing confusion of half-images. Some are the familiar white-haired, tattooed streamer you're familiar with. Others are a stern, black-haired youth who you first mistake for Loki – but subtle differences in his eyes and the line of the jaw betray his true identity: Baldur Valentinian. Each face speaks in a bewildering crash of voices.

"–weren't supposed to be here–"

"–too late to apologize–"

"–understand, I did this for you–"

With a stuttering scream, Switch's face snaps back to the one you're familiar with, yelling one last thing.

"WE HAVE TO FUCKING STOP THIS!"

MIND'S WARNING

The Timewave swept through the entirety of Calliope, and while its effects were not as pronounced outside of Chameleon's orbit, it hasn't gone unnoticed. If Mind is still alive (i.e. the PCs saved Mind during **Chapter 9: Smith-Shimano Corpro**, or haven't done that chapter yet), it will attempt to contact the PCs and appraise them of the situation. If the team hasn't met it yet, Mind will pretend to be BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER so as not to blow its cover.

"Hi! I'm sorry to bother you, but I have some important news: Dr. Valentinian's experiment on the anomaly is causing it to resonate! In isolation, this wouldn't be an issue, but unfortunately, an infinite number of other Dr. Valentinians had the exact same idea in their own universe! I'm running a few calculations to see how serious this problem is!"

There is a brief pause.

"My calculations say: VERY serious! You should probably do something about it!"

WAIT, WHY IS BARTENDER CONTACTING US?

"I'm just repeating the concerns of many people across the system! Also, on an unrelated note, I was just thinking how cool it would be if you resolved the crisis at the Twins! After you stop time from imploding, of course!"

WHY IS ODIN DOING THIS?

"While I can't be absolutely certain, my best guess is that Odin is attempting to 'cheat!' He's trying to locate and contact an iteration of himself from a timeline where he already worked out how to kill MONIST-1! This would let him skip all the hard and potentially dangerous work and jump straight to the part where he has a weapon to slay his white whale! Cool, huh?!"

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

"Unfortunately, that falls outside my ability to accurately simulate! Maybe Dr. Valentinian knows precisely what he's doing, and he'll be able to completely reverse this phenomenon once he has what he wants! That's certainly possible, because he's a smart cookie! On the other hand, he's also a psychologically unstable egotist obsessed with killing God, so you should also take that into account!

"Also, Feather claims she came from a timeline where Dr. Valentinian destroyed blinkspace! Of course, Feather is a cascading Deimosian who believes herself to be the deific avatar of a timeless pancosmic intelligence! I would take everything she says with a grain of salt, too!"

BEST COURSE OF ACTION

"I can't say for sure! If my psychological profile of Dr. Valentinian is accurate, the probability of peacefully convincing him to cease his experiment is nonzero, but not statistically relevant! If you want him to stop, you'll probably have to fight him!

"If you want to help him see the experiment through to its conclusion, I project a high likelihood that Lord Director Samuel Fry will launch an assault on you!

"Additionally, all of Dr. Valentinian's family members are high-order variables in this situation! There's a significant probability

that you'll have to fight at least one of them
no matter which option you choose!"

BEAT:
ATTACK THE GLASSCAGE

Placeholder

COMBAT 6.3:
A BROTHER'S LOVE

SITREP:	Gauntlet (*Lancer*, p. 271)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **THOR – T2 ELITE VETERAN AEGIS** Harrison Armory Saladin	**Size 2** **Aegis:** Guardian, Ring of Fire **Veteran:** +**HULL**, Lesser Sight, Steel Jaw
	1x **TYR – T2 ELITE VETERAN SEEDER** Harrison Armory Iskander	**Size 2** **Seeder:** Hopping Mines, Speed Deployer, Tripwires **Veteran:** +**ENGINEERING**, Deadly, Limitless
	1x **T2 ASSAULT**	Micro-Missile Barrage
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 GOLIATH** +1x **T2 OPERATOR**	Pin
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 BERSERKER** +1x **T2 PYRO**	Retribution Napalm Bomb, Unshielded Reactor
ALLIED FORCES		
FOR 3-5 PCS:	1x **SWITCH – T2 VETERAN SENTINEL**	**Size 2** **Sentinel:** Punisher Ammunition **Veteran:** Feign Death, Shock Armor

DETAILS

Having failed to convince Thor and Tyr to stand down, the team must now fight them to get to Odin and Loki.

This battle takes place at an interstitial security checkpoint between the inner ring and the Cage itself. It is designed to allow defense from either direction; a Glasscage must be able to stop intruders from getting in, but also to stop any anomalies that they might be researching from getting *out*.

The security checkpoints have adjustable cover sections that can raise or lower as necessary – as a **quick action**, any hostile character can summon or dismiss a cover section that is the same **Size** as them, so long as there isn't already a cover section in those spaces. These cover sections are right-angle wedges, with the sloped end pointing towards the enemy – these only provide **hard cover** on the flat side, and have **3 ARMOR** against any attack that hits the sloped side. However, characters don't need to climb the sloped side – they walk up it as normal.

There are also **slowzone pylons**, which are **Size 1** objects with **10 HP**, **1 ARMOR**, **8 EVASION** and **12 E-DEFENSE**. They continually generate a ⊙**2** field that inflicts **SLOWED** on any character inside it, which can't be removed by any means except leaving the field. Ranged attacks drawing line of effect through or into a **slowzone** have all ⌀ or ✷ they deal halved.

Due to Odin's experiment, the entire battlefield is plagued by **chronoglitches**. At the start of every round, randomly pick two NPCs. They swap places with each other, both characters **teleporting** to the other's position. Smaller characters **teleport** into any space previously occupied by larger characters, and larger characters **teleport** into at least one space previously occupied by smaller characters, or as close as possible. Then, randomly pick two PCs; they swap places in the same way.

Characters who are **IMMUNE** to involuntary movement (such as the **Sunzi**) or who cannot be **teleported** (for example, because they are inside a **Minotaur**'s **INTERDICTION FIELD**) are not valid targets for this effect; do not include them when randomly choosing.

TYR is piloting an HA Iskander named *Tread Carefully*, and is an expert in its use. As he has both **TRIPWIRES** and **HOPPING MINES**, any mine he places covers a ⇗**3** area, **10 spaces high** – and with **SPEED DEPLOYER**, he can place two of them at once. This gives him a commanding battlefield presence.

THOR pilots a Saladin which he named *Malazan Book of the Fallen* ("because it's utterly impenetrable"). He tends to stay on the objective zone, protecting his allies with his **DEFENSE NET**. Longer-range characters like the **ASSAULT** or the **OPERATOR** can take cover behind him, further increasing their survivability. Also, because he's larger than a regular Aegis, he can protect a wider area.

Unlike a regular Gauntlet sitrep, there are no reinforcements; besides the team defending the central chamber itself, Thor, Tyr and the unit they command represent the only remaining forces Odin can deploy against the PCs.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

If the PCs can't push past Thor and Tyr to reach the Cage, placeholder

Odin's experiment succeeds?

PC VICTORY

Placeholder

Continue onwards

BEAT:
THE INFINITE TREE

Whether they've battled through Odin's children and loyalists to stop him, or fought alongside them to defend the Glasscage, the team now stands upon a precipice.

Time unfolds around you, a myriad of possibilities slamming into one another as the walls between worlds grow thin.

Loki's Sunzi stands, all four arms reaching out to the Anomaly, whose inky-black surface ripples and churns violently. Loki's voice floods your comm feed, muttering a litany you don't fully understand: half differential calculation, half occult incantation.

But something stranger is happening. In many of the timelines you see, it's not Loki in the Sunzi: it's Switch. You can hear them, sometimes as themself, sometimes as Baldur, muttering the same litany.

In your own timeline – and a trillion, trillion others – Switch clutches their head in agony. "Guys, something… something's wrong… I can't…" In perfect unison, Loki echoes the exact same words. As you watch, the figure sitting in the pilot's seat flickers. For a moment, it's no longer Switch; it's Loki.

At the eye of this strange, paracausal hurricane, everyone is making their final move. Odin is enacting the final stage of his plan. Loki is doing one final favor for his father. Switch is out for revenge. Lord Director Fry is trying to salvage the mission. The PCs are the wildcard here, and everyone is angling for their help.

FINAL APPEALS

No matter whether the PCs chose to side with Odin and protect his experiment or with Switch and Lord Director Fry to shut it down, both sides make last-minute appeals to them, trying to either retain their loyalty or get them to switch sides.

Odin begs to be allowed to complete his experiment; he is willing to appeal to both emotion and reason. On a personal level, he doesn't want all of the sacrifice and pain to have been for nothing. On a rational level, he points out that he's likely the only person in Calliope who has the necessary expertise to counter Feather's power over blinkspace, and understanding her is key to defeating her. He also remarks that Lord Director Fry is a pariah in the Armory, while Odin commands respect. As for Switch, however justified their grudge against him might be, they care nothing for Calliope's safety – they're acting purely out of spite.

Lord Director Fry's argument is simple: Odin is endangering everyone in the vicinity of Chameleon, including his battlegroup. Regardless of how much data his experiment might generate, it's not worth the risk. There might still be civilians in orbit; prisoners might still be present on Umbra. Lord Director Fry will not allow an obsessive scientist to gamble their lives in the name of hypothetical progress. Unfortunately, he has no available forces left to press the matter; he must rely on Switch or the PCs.

It's clear that this is deeply personal for Switch; even their gestures towards the safety of Calliope center themself. Odin is playing with the anomaly just like he played with the lives of Switch and their brothers; he doesn't care about the human cost involved. It's also clear that they feel that Odin being allowed to continue would retroactively justify his mistreatment. They make a compelling point: Odin has proven willing to ignore ethics and morality if he thinks it will advance his schemes, and it always ends in misery.

Other individuals chime in, if present. Lyra doesn't know *what* Odin is doing, but she knows it's hurting her children – as it always does. Thor and Tyr's opinions will depend on what just happened on the Glasscage; they are likely to side with the father out of habit unless the PCs successfully talked them down during **Arc: Attack the Glasscage**.

SIDING WITH ODIN

For all his flaws, Odin is one of the few people who's been completely forthright and up-front with the PCs. He's never lied to them, never attempted to deceive them; he's one of the few people who believed their story with absolutely no reservations. He genuinely wants to help them defeat Feather, Andros Capella and the Cult; he might have ulterior motives for doing so, but he'll share them if asked.

He's ashamed to admit it, but Odin is – for once in his life – trying to skip the hard work. Time is of the essence, and he's trying to contact an alternate version of himself who's already done the research. He needs a weapon that will kill Feather (and, ultimately, YMIR) without damaging blinkspace. If such a weapon is possible to build, then somewhere among the infinite timelines of the universe is an Odin that already built it.

Feather, he points out, did more or less the same thing: she's brought knowledge and technology alien to this timeline with her. Odin can do the same. He just needs the team to stop Switch from ruining everything.

TALKING SWITCH DOWN

Switch is furious, lost and afraid. Their twin brother is in terrible agony – agony he subjected himself to willingly so Switch wouldn't have to endure it. But it was all for nothing; Switch is in the one place Loki tried so hard to ensure they wouldn't be at the time of the experiment.

However, it might still be possible to reach them and avoid violence if the PCs have done right by them in the past. For this to even have a chance of working, **all of Switch's family must still be alive**, and at least three of the following things must also be true:

- At least one PC helped out with Switch's fundraiser at the end of **Mission 5**.
- The **Calliope Clock** has at most one segment ticked (i.e. it is not yet in **Crisis**).
- The PCs completed **Arc: The Third Pillar** and successfully rescued Switch's mother.
- The PCs helped Switch and Loki reconcile.
- The PCs have bonded with Switch in some other significant and meaningful way.

Convincing Switch to back down will require empathy and tact. They are tormented by the guilt of the crimes their father tricked them into committing, burdened by a lifetime of living up to other peoples' expectations and stricken by grief over the pain they've caused their twin. This isn't just Switch showboating or acting out for attention: they genuinely believe stopping their father is the only way to make things right and atone for the things they've done.

Switch's mental image of Odin is inaccurate – although understandably so, shaped as it is by trauma. On a deep psychological level, Switch *needs* Odin to be wrong. In Switch's mind, if their father's experiment actually works and doesn't have terrible unforeseen consequences, was their own pain and suffering really that important in comparison?

It used to be easy, back when there were no mad gods, no apocalypse cults, no dead men rising from their graves, no terrifying displays of bleeding-edge blinkspace technology or paracausal power – back when their father was just a delusional fanatic. Now, though, he seems like the only sane man in the room; everything he warned about is coming true.

There's a fundamental problem here: because of Odin's failures as a parent, Switch lacks the emotional vocabulary to properly articulate that actions can be wrong even if they produce good outcomes. If Odin succeeds, Switch would understand that to mean that they deserved everything that happened to them; that they were just a stupid kid who should've shut up and done what they were told.

Switch can't accept this, because they know their pain and the pain of their brothers and the pain of the innocent people hurt by Odin's crusade all matter, but they were never taught how to say that it matters even if the end goal is important.

This is a situation best dealt with by roleplaying, but if you need to bring dice rolls into it, start a clock named **Talking Switch Down** with six segments. If four statements in the list above are true, tick two segments. If all five statements are true, tick four segments. Then create a clock called **Impatience** with two segments.

Rolling a **9 or less** unticks one segment on **Talking Switch Down**, rolling **10-19** ticks a segment and rolling **20+** ticks two segments. All rolls tick one segment on **Impatience**, regardless of the result.

If **Impatience** fills before **Talking Switch Down**, the attempt has failed; either the PCs must side with Switch, or they must begin **Combat: Visited Upon The Child** (p. ##). If **Talking Switch Down** fills first, Switch cools down and lets their father's experiment play out.

WHO ARE YOU, REALLY?

There's a way to get Switch to stand down instantly, and that's bring their core identity into question. This tactic requires that the PCs understand that Switch is undergoing a crisis of identity, and that they're willing to exploit it to get what they want.

It's emotionally manipulative, but confronting them in front of both their stream and their family about who they are and who they actually want to be is extremely effective. Who are the PCs talking to? Is this the Switch that wants to make things right with their brother? The Switch that wants justice against their father? Or is this just the Switch that wants to impress their audience?

If confronted with this, Switch will be unable to answer, and will back down immediately.

BETRAYING THOR AND TYR

If Thor and Tyr were talked down during **Arc: Attack the Glasscage**, they now agree with Switch that Odin has to be stopped. Thusly, if the PCs suddenly side with their father, it's a confusing betrayal. They will angrily point out that just moments ago, the PCs told them that Odin was an imminent danger to Calliope and potentially the cosmos; is it all suddenly fine? Was *anything* the PCs said to them true or genuine?

Apply a persistent **+1⊖** penalty to all rolls made to convince Switch to stand down, as the brothers constantly interrupt and heckle the PCs. Worse, if the PCs fail to convince Switch to stand down, Thor and Tyr will side with their sibling, adding two powerful NPCs to the enemy roster. If the PCs manage to talk Switch down anyway, their brothers will stand down as well, but they're *not* happy about it.

SIDING WITH SWITCH

Whatever the PCs think of their motives, Switch is right about one thing: Odin's experiment is putting Calliope at risk. Everything he offers is a maybe: m*aybe* it'll produce useful results. *Maybe* the disruption to spacetime will be brief. *Maybe* it won't spread further than Chameleon. *Maybe* Odin can make a weapon that kills Andros Capella for good.

What about the flipside? What if the fabric of spacetime is permanently damaged? What if it spreads? What if Feather is right, and Odin's experiment is the thing that wipes out blinkspace? What if this is all for nothing?

The harm Odin has already done? That's real. That's definite. That can be proven – he'll even admit to it!

TALKING ODIN DOWN

Ever since the day he watched his parents die in the skies above Ras Shamra, every single action Odin Valentinian has ever taken is in service of destroying MONIST-1. By asking him to stop his experiment, the PCs are asking him to abandon his entire life's work moments before its culmination.

Despite everything, the possibility does exist – barely. There is an argument that will convince him to stop, and a determined PC might be able to find it. For this possibility to exist, however, **all four of Odin's children must still be alive**. If even one has died, Odin's grief at their passing precludes any chance of the PCs talking him down.

Start two clocks named **Facts and Logic** and **Odin Loses Patience**, each with four segments. All rolls to talk Odin down are **Heroic** – that is, success is achieved only on a result of **20+**. Rolling a **9 or less** ticks two segments on **Odin Loses Patience**, while rolling **10-19** ticks one. Rolling **20+** ticks one segment on **Facts and Logic**. Once a PC gets **20+** on a roll with a skill trigger, they cannot use the same skill trigger again during this exchange, though other PCs can.

If **Odin Loses Patience** fills first, the attempt has failed; they must either side with Odin or begin **Combat: Sins of the Father** (p. ###). If **Facts and Logic** fills first (or at the same time as **Odin Loses Patience**), the attempt has succeeded, and with the greatest reluctance, Odin stands down.

Generic appeals to morality simply won't work on Odin. He already knows his actions cause harm, but believes it's a necessary evil in pursuit of universal freedom from a tyrant god.

However, there are a few avenues that might find more success. The first and most effective is to undermine his scientific reasoning. Despite being one of the smartest men in the galaxy, Odin is bizarrely modest about science. If one of the PCs brings up a credible flaw in his hypothesis that he overlooked, his scientific mindset would compel him to change course.

The second requires deep understanding of Odin's psyche. Odin is, in fact, a deeply traumatized and wounded man who lost both his parents and a societal role model at a young age, and was lied to by everyone he trusted. He's trying to create a world where he can never feel vulnerable again, which simply isn't possible.

Finding a flaw in Odin's reasoning will require either expertise in either blinkspace science or game-theory analysis of trans-timeline information sharing. Successfully psychoanalyzing him will require that the PCs interacted with him extensively and developed a deep understanding of his mindset. Neither tactic should be easy to pull off.

The third avenue is direct appeal to emotion. Moralizing with him won't work, but pointing out that his children are in pain will get to him. He was traumatized by the loss of his parents as a child; why is he traumatizing his own kids?

THE TREE AND THE APPLE

There's a way to get Odin to stand down instantly. This tactic is the hardest to pull off, but has the greatest effect, because it hinges upon Odin's greatest fear: he doesn't want his children to be like him.

Making this sort of emotional appeal will require that the PCs have a firm understanding of the psychology of both Odin and all four his children, which will likely require that they spent a lot of time with them. It hinges upon the team being able to identify the ways in which Thor, Tyr, Loki and Switch have started to resemble their father.

Thor is cynical and withdrawn. Tyr is obsessed with a goal whose pursuit makes him miserable. Loki has become increasingly willing to hurt himself for a goal he's not even sure he can achieve. Perhaps worst of all, Switch has become cold, manipulative and self-righteous, chasing vengeance at the cost of everything that makes them good and kind.

If the PCs successfully identify the way all four of his children have been warped by his obsession, they don't even need to roll. Odin can deal with *being* a monster, but he can't deal with *creating* them, especially from his own flesh and blood. The horrifying realization that he is perpetuating a cycle of violence and abuse is enough to stop him in his tracks.

COMBAT 6.4A:
SINS OF THE FATHER

SITREP:	Demolition (p. 320)	
OBJECTIVE(S):	5x **RESONANCE PROJECTOR**	(**Size** 3, 20 **HP**)
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **ODIN – T2 ULTRA EXOTIC VOIDER**	**Voider:** Abduct, Reposition, Slip Drive, Warp Carbine **Exotic:** Chronotorus **Ultra:** Legion, Unstoppable
	1x **AZZY – T2 ELITE VETERAN SCOURER**	**Scourer:** Emergency Vent, Pulse Laser **Veteran:** +**HULL**, Deadly, Limitless, NHP Co-Pilot
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 BARRICADE**	+**ENGINEERING**, Drag Down, Extrudite
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 GOLIATH**	Watchful Guardian
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ARCHER** 1x **T2 OPERATOR**	Blinding Shells Telefrag
FOR 4 PCS	+1x **T2 BASTION**	Fearless Defender
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 WITCH**	Spread Suffering
POSSIBLE ALLIED FORCES		
FOR 3-5 PCS:	1x **SWITCH // LOKI – T2 VETERAN SENTINEL**	**Size 2** **Sentinel:** Punisher Ammunition **Veteran:** Feign Death, Shock Armor

DETAILS

The PCs must destroy all five of Odin's **Resonance Projectors** before "Convergence" occurs – they may not know precisely what this means, but given the effects of the Timewaves, it's probably bad.

This battle occurs in the heart of the Glasscage, mere meters from the Anomaly. The Anomaly is a **Size 3** object with **8 EVASION** and **8 E-DEFENSE** that can't be moved or damaged in any way, but when it is struck by any effect that causes damage, it releases a △**7** wave of chaotic energy facing outwards from the point it was hit. Characters caught in the wave lose any **IMMUNITIES** they have and can't clear conditions in any way until the end of their next turn. The wave also collapses any **BLINK RIFTS** in its area.

The immense spatiotemporal distortion in the chamber is hazardous to NHPs. At the start of each round, increase the window for cascade checks by **1** – from **1** to **1-2** at the start of the first round, to **1-3** on the second, to **1-4** on the third, and so on. This includes rolls **AZZY** makes due to having the **NHP CO-PILOT** trait.

ODIN is a **VOIDER**, an enemy type of his own invention. The Voider excels at the control of battlefield positioning; it creates **BLINK RIFTS** that slow PCs and disable their reactions, and can teleport between them at will. It can also use its **VOID PRISM** to detonate them, even chaining detonations if the rifts are close together. Additionally, it has **ABDUCT** and **REPOSITION**, which allow it to relocate PCs and allies respectively.

Odin's weapons aren't very powerful, but he is a master of dictating the terms of engagement. He can pull close-range PCs far away from their targets, or move his own allies closer to PCs who are trying to keep their distance. He can also use **CHRONOTORUS** to force d20 rerolls, helping allies or hindering enemies.

Additionally, Odin is very difficult to pin down. His **UNSTOPPABLE** trait makes him immune to all involuntary movement and **PRONE**, meaning **RAM** does nothing to him. If a PC gets close, he can simply create a **BLINK RIFT** and use **SLIP DRIVE** to teleport away without provoking reactions. He can still be grappled, but the grapple will break if a character tries to move while holding him.

AZZY is the ASURA-class NHP to whom Odin gave the duty of teaching Baldur to pilot – and of editing his sense data in real-time during the theft from the Volador. He's now tasked with defending the inner sanctum while Odin finishes his experiment, and pilots Baldur's Sherman Mk. II with deadly skill. However, as an NHP, he is at risk of traumatic cascade from taking Structure or Stress damage, represented by the **NHP CO-PILOT** trait.

If Switch is present during this fight, the sight of Azzy and their old mech will enrage them, and they will prioritize settling the score rather than dealing with the mission objectives. That's one of the reasons Azzy is here – Odin can easily predict Switch's behavior.

However, every time Odin uses **CHRONOTORUS**, Switch and Loki swap places between the Tortuga and the Sunzi. The version of Loki piloting the Tortuga doesn't share Switch's animosity for Azzy, and will prioritize the mission objectives instead of revenge – though that might still mean trying to neutralize Azzy, if he's presenting a serious obstacle.

Using **EXTRUDITE**, the **BARRICADE** can print a cube, and then print the second cube right on top of it, creating a structure that occupies a **Size 2** footprint but is 4 spaces tall, sufficient to provide **hard cover** and block line of sight for characters up to **Size 3**, including the Demolition targets.

ENEMY MECH

ODIN VALENTINIAN

SIZE 1

Ultra Exotic Voider
Controller/Support

"You know what the most insufferable thing about you is, father? You want to have your cake and eat it. You want to be the brutal pragmatist, the one who abandons morality to do the terrible things other people can't - but then you want people to love you for it, like it's some kind of heroic sacrifice! You want to be the Tyrant and the Saint at the same bloody time!"

- Loki Valentinian, to Odin Valentinian, 5016u

HUL: -1	**HP:** 17	**Armor:** 1
AGI: +3	**Evasion:** 12	**Speed:** 4
SYS: +3	**E-Defense:** 16	**Save Target:** 14
ENG: +1	**Heat Cap:** 7	**Sensors:** 10

EXOTIC

As an **EXOTIC**, **Odin** gains **+1** on **SYSTEMS** saves, and tech attacks against him receive **+1**. **SCAN** does not reveal any information about his **EXOTIC** systems.

ULTRA

As an **ULTRA**, **ODIN**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **4 structure** and **4 stress**.
- Can clear one condition affecting him at the start of its turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of his turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

SYSTEMS

Blink Rift

Trait, Protocol

Odin creates a **BLINK RIFT** in a free space within **5**. A **BLINK RIFT** is a **Size 1** object that projects a constant **2 distortion field** around it. While inside the **distortion field**:

- Voiders (including Odin) are unaffected by it.
- Hostile characters are **SLOWED** and can't take **reactions**, and if they start their turn in the field, these effects persist until the end of that turn.

BLINK RIFTS have **6 HP**, **EVASION 10, E-DEFENSE 10** and can't be targeted by **tech attacks**. When a **BLINK RIFT** is destroyed, each non-Voider character within **5** must make a **HULL** save or be pulled into the space the rift occupied, or as close as possible.

Odin can have no more than three **BLINK RIFTS** active at the same time. The **distortion fields** of **BLINK RIFTS** can overlap, but their effects don't stack.

"Doesn't it look kind of like the Fire Gate?"
- Loki Valentinian, to Switch

SHORTCUT — Trait, Quick Action

This action can only be taken while adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT**. Odin **teleports** to a space adjacent to another **BLINK RIFT**.

"Destination lock confirmed, bridge stable."

Void Prism

Main Cannon, +4 vs Evasion, Arcing
[5] [6]

If the target is a **BLINK RIFT**, this attack automatically hits. Odin may then repeat this attack against any number of characters or objects within **5** of the rift, drawing line of sight and range from it. If this includes another **BLINK RIFT**, the process repeats. A character can only be targeted by a secondary attack once per activation of this weapon.

After a **BLINK RIFT** is struck by this weapon (whether or not Odin chose to make secondary attacks) it is destroyed, causing it to collapse as usual.

"I should thank you. I've been looking for an opportunity to field-test this device."

Warp Carbine

Main Rifle, +4 vs Evasion, AP
[5] [3]

On hit: The target must make an **ENGINEERING** save or be **teleported** towards the origin of this attack a number of spaces equal to the damage dealt by this weapon.

Odin may draw range and line of sight for attacks with this weapon from a **BLINK RIFT** instead of himself.

"Here's a little trick I've been working on."

Abduct
System, Quick Tech, +2 vs. E-Def

Odin makes a **tech attack** against a hostile character within ⟋**5**. On a success, the target is **teleported** adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT** of Odin's choice.

"Wait right there. I'll be with you shortly."

BESPOKE OPERATING SYSTEM
Trait

Odin gains **+4 E-DEFENSE** (this has been included in his stats above) and **+1** on all **tech attacks**.

"H0R_OS? What, you don't even write your own code? I expected better from you."

ANCHOR
Trait

Odin has **IMMUNITY to all involuntary movement**, including **KNOCKBACK** and **PRONE**.

"Ah yes, ramming. Very clever! Have you mastered the funny little symbols in books yet, or are you still just looking at the pictures?"

Chronoglitch
System, Reaction, Exotic, 1/round

Odin's experiment is causing distortions in the flow of time. He may either reroll **1d20** or force another character in line of sight to reroll **1d20** as a **reaction**. The new result must be kept. **SCAN** does not reveal any information about this system.

***Loki** is the pilot // **Baldur** is the pilot*

Reposition
System, Quick Action, Recharge 4+

Odin may **teleport** one allied character within **SENSORS** adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT**.

"You. Deal with this."

Slip Drive
System

Odin can use **SHORTCUT** even when he's not adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT**.

"Stimulating as this exchange has been, I'm needed elsewhere. No need to get up."

COMBAT 6.4B:
VISITED UPON THE CHILD

SITREP:	Holdout (*Lancer*, p. 272)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **SWITCH** – **T2 ULTRA SENTINEL** IPS-N Tortuga	**Size 2**, remove **Eye of Midnight** **Sentinel:** Punisher Ammunition **Ultra:** Limitless, Siege Shield
	1x **SWORDGUY69** – **T2 RPV RONIN** 1x **STELLARINDEXER** – **T2 RPV AEGIS**	Extended Blade
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **DELUDEDSQUIRREL** – **T2 RPV ARCHER**	Impending Threat
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **MRDISCO** – **T2 RPV RAINMAKER**	Volley
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **SHADOWCAT** – **T2 RPV ARCHER** 1x **3HC0** – **T2 RPV COMMANDER MIRAGE** 1x **PROPIPE** – **T2 RPV ASSAULT**	Impending Threat Bolster Network Rank Discipline, Underslung Grenade Launcher
FOR 4-5 PCS:	+1x **THUNDERSKINK** – **T2 RPV ACE** +1x **UTOKEANPILLAR** – **T2 RPV SUPPORT**	Bombing Bay, Strafe Latch Drone
POSSIBLE ALTERNATE REINFORCEMENTS (see below)		
FOR 3-5 PCS:	1x **THOR** – **T2 VETERAN AEGIS** Harrison Armory Saladin	**Size 2** **Aegis:** Guardian, Ring of Fire **Veteran:** +**HULL**, Lesser Sight, Steel Jaw
	1x **TYR** – **T2 VETERAN SEEDER** Harrison Armory Iskander	**Size 2** **Seeder:** Det Spike, Grav Spike **Veteran:** +**ENGINEERING**,

DETAILS

Running short on allies after alienating the team and their family, Switch has turned to the one source of unconditional love they have left: their audience. They've activated a swarm of drone mechs remotely piloted by their highest-paying subscribers.

This is a mixed blessing. None of them have military training, they lack the discipline to employ small-unit tactics, the signal latency between their VR rigs and the mechs is limiting their reaction times, and most of them are trying too hard to impress Switch. This explains the **RPV** template's permanent **IMPAIRED** status.

On the other hand, these mechs can survive direct hits to the cockpit and keep on swinging, because there's no pilot inside. In addition, since these people are *aware* they're in no danger, they can take immense risks and execute daring plays that even the most reckless pilots would never dream of.

Many of the hostiles have ways of overcoming or bypassing the RPV template's major weaknesses.

STELLARINDEXER's **AEGIS**, has useful interactions with the **RPV** template – since **REGENERATIVE SHIELDING** makes the Aegis immune to **IMPAIRED**, it doesn't suffer the RPV's biggest weakness, and **DEFENSE NET** can strip **IMPAIRED** off of other RPVs as well.

For as long as **3HC0** is on the field and not **JAMMED**, her **BOLSTER NETWORK** ability counteracts every RPV's innate weakness to tech attacks. She can also move StellarIndexer even when he's **IMMOBILIZED**, allowing **DEFENSE NET**'s zone of safety to be repositioned.

PROPIPE's **RANK DISCIPLINE** gives him extra Accuracy when standing next to an ally. His primary weapon also has **RELIABLE** damage, meaning that if he picks his targets well, he can still deal chip damage even if he misses his shots.

Exploit **SHADOWCAT** and **DELUDEDSQUIRREL**'s **SUPERIOR SENTINEL** trait by making the majority of their attacks as **reactions**. Since their **LIGHT MACHINE GUNS** have **RELIABLE** damage, pick players who has low damage mitigation and constantly harass them – even if their shots miss, they'll inflict considerable injury.

THUNDERSKINK's **BOMBING BAY** and **STRAFE** abilities give them methods of dealing damage that aren't affected by **IMPAIRED**. When using their **MISSILE LAUNCHER**, prioritize players with low **E-DEFENSE**; this will make the extra Difficulty matter less.

UTOKEANPILLAR's **LATCH DRONE** gives an ally regenerating health and **+1** to all attacks, checks and saves, completely negating **IMPAIRED**. He might well get only one chance to use this if it doesn't recharge, so choose wisely – it should ideally be an ally who's likely to take a lot of damage, and who can't benefit from any of the other ways of negating or bypassing **IMPAIRED**.

If any character has a spare **quick action**, use it to throw out **LOCK ON** – this is useful in any combat, but extra Accuracy is crucial here.

SWITCH is the main character of this fight (and everything else, in their own mind). They will be front and center at every opportunity, using their Tortuga's bulk to screen allies. Depending on their relationship with the PCs, they may simply try to push past them without hurting them too much – or, alternatively, they may be gunning for specific PCs out of spite.

As an **ULTRA**, Switch can **OVERWATCH** an unlimited number of times per round, and so doesn't need the **SENTINEL**'s **EYE OF MIDNIGHT**. They also have **SIEGE ARMOR** and **IMMUNITY** to **SHREDDED**, meaning that PCs *have* to enter their threat to deal full damage to them.

If the PCs angered **THOR** and **TYR** by convincing them to stand against their father and then switching sides at the last moment, they'll join the fight on Switch's side. Remove **PROPIPE** and **SHADOWCAT**, and replace them with **THOR** and **TYR**.

Thor will dive into close quarters along with Switch, while Tyr will attack and fade, running in to throw **DET SPIKE** on PCs and then **OVERCHARGING** to throw a **GRAV SPIKE** on a PC he wants to pull out of position.

ENEMY MECH

SWITCH

SIZE 2

Ultra Custom Sentinel
Defender

"Oh, bullshit! Don't patronize me - this isn't about the law, or scientific ethics, or-or-or all the blood on his hands! If you cared about any of that, you would've run to the Department of Justice, not to Calliope! This is about YOUR pride, YOUR ego, YOUR grievance, YOUR bloody hero complex! It's not enough for you that justice is done - if it's not YOUR justice, it's worse than nothing, isn't it?! You're JUST like him!"

- Loki Valentinian, to Ipswich DeLacey, 5016u

HUL: +3	**HP:** 25	**Armor:** 1
AGI: +2	**Evasion:** 11	**Speed:** 5
SYS: +2	**E-Defense:** 11	**Save Target:** 12
ENG: +2	**Heat Cap:** 8	**Sensors:** 10

CUSTOM

As a **CUSTOM**, **SWITCH** uses weapons, systems or traits not typically found on mechs in their class.

ULTRA

As an **ULTRA**, **SWITCH**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **5 structure** and **5 stress**.
- Can clear one condition affecting them at the start of its turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of their turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round.
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

SYSTEMS

Decksweeper Automatic Shotgun

Main CQB, +2 vs Evasion
[⟋5] [⌘3] [8⌀]

"It was a perfectly standard sponsorship deal. We don't control their actions. It's absurd to hold IPS-N responsible for how our equipment was used just because it happened on camera."

- IPS-N press release

Nanocarbon Blade

Main Melee, +4 vs Evasion
[⌘1] [6⌀]

DeimosPrevent (Mod): *Switch this is PERVERSE*
DeimosPrevent (Mod): *TRICKING KIDS INTO BEING DRONE PILOTS IS EXACTLY WHAT HE DID TO YOU*

- stream chatter

GUARDIAN — Trait

Adjacent allied characters can use Switch for **hard cover**.

"You have no idea what my father is capable of! I'm trying to protect this system from him!"

HYPER-REFLEX — Trait

Characters damaged by Switch's **OVERWATCH** attacks also become **SLOWED** until the end of their next turn.

"I don't care what it takes! If it stops him, it's worth the cost!"

DIRECT INJECTION OVERCYCLE — Trait

Switch can **OVERCHARGE**. Instead of the standard cost, they always gain **1d6** 🌡.

"No, chat, I'm not gonna 'OC loop double Scan.' Mods, send that guy a basilisk!"

HyperDense Armor

System

Switch gains **RESISTANCE** to all damage from attacks that originate beyond ⟋**3**.

"Come on. Get closer. Are you afraid to look me in the eye?!"

OUTCOME

The immediate outcomes of either branch of **The Infinite Tree** are identical but opposite. If the PCs sided with Switch, Odin's defeat represents a victory; if they sided with Odin, the opposite is true.

ODIN IS STOPPED

Odin lets out a shriek of despair as the last resonator crumbles. The wound in time torn open by the Tachyon*'s ingress twists and trembles. You teeter on the precipice of eternity, the moments creeping past glacially as the event horizon shrinks, collapsing in on itself.*

You catch fading glimpses of a trillion trillion other selves, where you stand triumphant over the same wreck and ruin. In just as many, though, you tried to stop it, and you feel their shame and defeat just as deeply as your victory in this timeline.

Then there is a lurch as reality reasserts itself. You no longer see endless worlds through endless eyes; your consciousness has returned to the singular. In the boundless infinity of a split second, you feel a great potential lost to the universe.

The chamber is in absolute chaos. Spheres of zero-gravity flame shimmer, casting eerie blue light throughout the chamber. Blinding arcs of electricity dance between shattered pieces of equipment. Alarms wail discordantly.

And there, at the center of it all, where the anomaly used to be, is Odin Valentinian. Somehow, despite the lack of gravity, he has fallen to his knees, weeping bitterly.

Odin's plans for the Infinite Tree have been stopped forever.

ODIN IS VICTORIOUS

You feel time itself shudder. You feel your ego torn apart by a flood of conflicting memories, the endless roots of a trillion trillion lifetimes bursting towards the sunlight of this moment, all the choices you made, all the steps you took, all the loves and hates and gains and losses collapsing into an infinite kaleidoscope of possible pasts and futures.

Through a trillion trillion eyes you see every possible configuration of the battle unfold. Every second, a million million of those possibilities wink out as the resonators in their timelines are smashed or burnt or shattered or atomized, sometimes by your hand, sometimes by the hand of someone you failed to stop.

Suddenly, everything snaps into focus, your awareness no longer divided among the infinite myriad of yourselves. You return to your own body, your own timeline, your own self, unique, singular. But there is still one duplicate left in the room: Odin stands facing himself, but different: a self that's older and wiser, a triumphant self.

There is an exchange of words that you do not hear – or if you do, you do not understand. Then, the other Odin is gone, and the Odin you know holds something in his hands, an unseen thing that he cradles as if it were a newborn child.

"I have it," he says. "It's done."

Whatever Odin was looking for in the Infinite Tree, he has apparently found it. In spite of all the dire omens, Calliope and blinkspace both endure, none the worse for wear.

DOWNTIME: LEGACY

THE VALENTINIAN FAMILY

Placeholder

ENTIRE FAMILY IS ALIVE AND RECONCILED

This is the ideal outcome. It means that all the following things are true:

- **Loki Valentinian** and **Ipswich DeLacey** were successfully reconciled.
- **Lyra Van Kraanen** was rescued during **Arc: The Third Pillar**, or granted freedom from the Armory via **Arc: Framing the Guilty**.
- **Thor** and **Tyr Valentinian** were either talked down before **Combat: A Brother's Love**, survived the fight, or were not fought at all.
- **Ipswich DeLacey** was talked down before **Combat: Visited Upon the Child** or was not fought at all.
- **Odin Valentinian** survived **Combat: Sins of the Father** or was not fought at all.

Odin makes as sincere an apology to his children as he can. He has treated them atrociously, and he cannot undo any of that. He says he will never be worthy of their love or their forgiveness, but he will try his hardest regardless. He doesn't deserve to be called father, but he will nonetheless try to be the father he should have been to them their entire lives, and he will start by telling them everything, keeping no more secrets from them.

To his ex-wife, he also apologizes as best he can. She deserved someone far better than him. She agrees, and leaves to assist Calliope after embracing all her children for the first time in more than ten years.

Thor, Tyr, Loki and Switch begin plans to form a fireteam of their own, and Switch polls their stream chat for names. The most popular is "The Gorgeous Valentines," which all four siblings immediately reject.

Whether the PCs helped him achieve his goals with the Infinite Tree or stopped him at the last minute, Odin thanks them for what they've done. He will devote all his talents to finding a way to counteract Feather's powers and bring an end to the Cult.

ENTIRE FAMILY IS ALIVE BUT NOT RECONCILED

If **Lyra** is safe, and neither **Odin** nor any of his children are dead, but if:

- **Loki Valentinian** and **Ipswich DeLacey** were *not* successfully reconciled.

… and one of the following things are true:

- **Ipswich DeLacey** assisted the PCs during **Combat: A Brother's Love**.
- **Ipswich DeLacey** attacked the PCs during **Combat: Visited Upon the Child**.

The love between Ipswich and their twin is sundered, perhaps forever.

If Switch was on the winning side, Loki departs the system, disgusted and disillusioned by how alien his sibling now seems to him. Switch remains behind, but seems to have lost their love of life. Their streaming schedule becomes patchy.

If Switch was on the losing side, they depart Calliope instead. It feels like half of Union watched them humiliate themselves live, in full color, and the shame of it is just too much to bear. Meanwhile, Loki and the other siblings remain in the system to help Odin with his work, but Loki is no longer the joyous, mischievous character he used to be.

ONE OF THE CHILDREN IS DEAD

If **Thor**, **Tyr**, **Loki** or **Switch** are dead, and the PCs are in any way responsible, **Odin** makes things clear: he will still assist them in resolving the crisis in Calliope, because he has no choice. Once he is finished with that, he promises to their faces that those responsible for the death of his child will die. If **Lyra** is alive, she joins Odin in this vow – it's one of the few things they can agree on.

If either **Switch** or **Loki** are dead, the other twin swears a similar oath of vengeance upon the PCs responsible.

MORE THAN ONE CHILD IS DEAD

If two or more of **Odin**'s children are dead and the PCs are responsible, he attempts to kill the PCs at the first opportunity. They have lost him as an ally, and he will need to be dealt with.

LYRA IS MISSING

If the PCs attempted **Arc: The Third Pillar** but couldn't stop the Cult from abducting **Lyra**, she is currently

missing in action. Her children will drop everything to go and rescue her; they eventually succeed, but they can't be called in to help for the rest of **Act 2**.

ODIN IS DEAD

If **Odin** is dead, but all of his children survive, they are stricken with grief and will never truly forgive the PCs, but they understand that it was ultimately necessary to prevent a catastrophe. They agree to put aside their differences and continue his research.

TRAGEDY

If **Odin** and at least one of his children are dead, the situation is unsalvageable. Any remaining Valentinian children depart the system in grief and disgust. No-one is left to interpret Odin's notes or continue his research.

The Valentinian Siblings

Favors, Limited 4

Trained from birth to kill gods, Thor, Tyr, Loki and Switch were given the best military education the Armory could provide. Now, they have a cause worthy of fighting for and a god worthy of slaying.

Expend any number of charges at the start of combat. That many Valentinian siblings (**THOR**, **TYR**, **LOKI** and **SWITCH**) of your choice appear as NPC allies to assist you. Thanks to Odin's advances in blinkspace technology, they can insert and extract without issue from any location.

Thor Valentinian

Ally

"I'm no longer a passenger in my own life."

THOR pilots an HA Saladin, the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, represented by a **Size 2 T2 VETERAN AEGIS** with **+HULL**, **ADAPTIVE SHIELDING**, **GUARDIAN**, **SHOCK ARMOR** and **LEGENDARY**.

Tyr Valentinian

Ally

"I am not the failures my father saw in me."

TYR pilots an HA Iskander, the *Tread Carefully*, represented by a **Size 2 T2 VETERAN SEEDER** with **+SYSTEMS**, **GRAV SPIKE**, **SPEED DEPLOYER**, **HACKER** and **HEADSHOT**.

Loki Valentinian

Ally

"I finally found something worth believing in."

LOKI pilots an HA Sunzi, the *Never-There*, represented by a **T2 VETERAN VOIDER** with **+AGILITY**, **REPOSITION**, **RIFT STABILIZER**, **SLIPPERY** and **LIGHTNING REFLEXES**.

Ipswich DeLacey

Ally

"I know who I am now, and I do it on purpose."

SWITCH pilots an IPS-N Tortuga, the *Frame-Perfect*, represented by a **Size 2 T2 VETERAN SENTINEL** with **+ENGINEERING**, **PUNISHER AMMUNITION**, **DEADLY** and **LESSER SIGHT**.

Blinkspear

Main Melee, Exotic Gear, AP, Thrown 5, Unique, 1 SP
[⚔2] [1d6⌀]

If you throw this weapon, you may retrieve it as a **free action** on your turn, no matter where you are, even if you're **INTANGIBLE** or not on the battlefield. This is the only method by which you may retrieve this weapon other than the method described below.

If you **teleport** or are **teleported**, and the Blinkspear is not in the same space as you, you may change the destination to the space it occupies instead of your original destination as a **reaction**. Doing so retrieves the Blinkspear.

Odin named it "Gungnir," because of course he did. It's not precisely the godslaying weapon he promised, but it's a start.

LORD DIRECTOR FRY

ODIN WAS VICTORIOUS

Placeholder – Lord Director Fry is sidelined.

ODIN WAS STOPPED

Placeholder – Lord Director Fry successfully invokes emergency powers.

COLDWATER 484

PRISON BREAK OCCURRED

Placeholder

PRISON BREAK DID NOT OCCUR

Placeholder

HA LGC-05 “Transcendent Rail”
Ship Upgrade

The signature weapon of the Armory’s Barbarossa chassis is infamous for being temperamental and unwieldy on a mech, but it’s much more reliable when mounted on a starship. So, what if we made it incredibly temperamental again, by allowing you to skip the projectile through blinkspace into literally any location?

When Siren was shown the specs for it, she made a noise somewhere between a giggle and a scream.

The *Dragon’s Tooth* is now well-armed enough to take down a capital ship with sustained fire.

Additionally, **1/mission**, the team gain one free use of the **BOMBARDMENT** reserve (*Lancer*, p. 52). This works even if Siren isn’t nearby, or they’re not in a location she could target conventionally – a deep cave system, a metavault, a pocket dimension, etc. – so long as they can communicate with her.

DOWNTIME ACTIVITY

THE GODSLAYER PROJECT

Dr. Odin Valentinian, should he still live, has promised to provide a weapon capable of killing Andros Capella on a permanent basis.

If Odin was allowed to complete his experiment, no further action needs to be taken – another Odin has already done all of the work, and was more than willing to share the fruits of his labors with other versions of himself. The only thing the Odin in this universe needs now is time to build and test the weapons – they won’t be done until **Act 3**.

If the PCs (or Switch) thwarted his experiment and sealed the Anomaly, Odin needs to begin again almost from scratch.

CHAPTER 7:

WHY I'M SO COOL AND POPULAR

*"Debate? Debate?! I can't even conceive of how little attention you must've paid in my lectures if you think that I'd ever **debate** Rodericke Steele. Do you even understand what debate is? It's a structured discourse through which opposing viewpoints are examined and clarified.*

*"Rodericke Steele doesn't have an opposing viewpoint. What he has is a **threat**. He believes I shouldn't be able to exist without paying him a fee. That's what putting a price tag on the necessities of life **means**! You pay him money, or you starve to death. I think I should be able to exist without having to pay rent on my own vital functions. He doesn't. There's nothing to examine there, nothing to clarify – we both know precisely what we want, and we can't both have it at the same time. There's no compromise or middle position. It is morally inexcusable for a thing that everyone needs to live to come with a price tag.*

"He could still live in the absurd and opulent luxury he currently enjoys without controlling the Icebreaker's food industry – for fuck's sake, that's the exact state of affairs at this very moment! But it's never enough. Nothing is ever enough for the fascist. There's a coin somewhere not in his vault, a critic somewhere who hasn't been silenced, a person who makes him uncomfortable because they exist outside his understanding. Fascism is a vampire that will literally drown in blood before ever being satiated.

"Rodericke Steele thinks I should die if I don't pay him money. I just think he should die."

– Subtext Ísfûr Cowards,
to a student, 5016u

OVERVIEW:
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

THE *PERSIMMON*

In 4680u, the IDS *Persimmon* departed from Rao Co Station towards C4L-P313/GW2 as part of the First Wave. It was unusual for two reasons: firstly, it had been chartered by Impact Dynamics, an arms manufacturer with no previous experience in space colonization. Secondly, and perhaps more relevantly, it carried an apocalyptic superweapon in its cargo hold.

The **Gravity Anvil** was an experimental device capable of generating artificial gravity fields, powerful enough to crush ships like soda cans, rip entire city blocks out of the ground and tear asteroids from their orbits. Impact Dynamics had been developing it under contract from the Second Committee, but abruptly found themselves without a buyer when SecComm lost the Revolution.

This put Impact Dynamics in somewhat of a bind: they had spent almost their entire net worth developing a weapon of mass destruction in full knowledge that their clients would use it for war crimes, and now their clients were either dead, in hiding, or forming a competing arms manufacturer on Ras Shamra. There was nobody they could sell it to, and thus no way to recoup its ruinous development costs.

Things got even worse during the mid-4600s, when ThirdComm had consolidated its position enough that it could start investigating its predecessor's misdeeds. Suddenly, Impact Dynamics weren't just sitting on a ridiculous boondoggle they couldn't sell; it was now a smoking gun proving that they'd collaborated with SecComm to build a terror weapon.

The smartest course of action would've been to surrender to Union voluntarily, admit wrongdoing, hand over the research and place their trust in ThirdComm's commitment to rehabilitation, mercy and human dignity. The next smartest course of action would've been to throw the damn thing into the nearest star, along with every researcher who worked on it, every object it had been tested on and every document that spoke of it.

The problem with Impact Dynamics' executives is that they weren't very smart.

There was absolutely no question of giving up their company's crowning scientific achievement and most expensive project, and certainly not handing themselves over to the criminal proceedings of the Third Committee. It had to be kept, in hopes that, in some future day, political circumstances might change and they could sell it to someone.

Thusly, Impact Dynamics sent their most dangerous secret to C4L-P313/GW2, under the guise of a colony mission, with specific instructions to a few hand-picked agents to hide the thing once the colonization business was well underway. The *Persimmon* would set up a prosperous colony on the system's second planet, then depart in search of a good hiding place.

As with every single plan involving Calliope, it went fine until Calliope got involved.

The *Persimmon* arrived to discover that the system was a dud, the paradise planet it was meant to build a colony on was a rainswept wasteland, the omninet was unreachable and every colonial venture was quickly running out of food, fuel and oxygen. The majority of the colonists started to panic, but the agents panicked even harder: with no omninet connection, they couldn't contact corporate to receive new orders.

The rest of the *Persimmon*'s colonists joined in on the plan to deceive their sponsors about the state of Calliope, because they assumed that Impact Dynamics wouldn't bother to send a rescue mission for them. On any other day they'd have been right, but unbeknownst to them, their ship carried a cargo so precious that the corporation would have paid *any* price to retrieve it.

Unfortunately for the agents sent to hide the Gravity Anvil, this meant that all lightspeed transmissions were monitored with paranoid vigilance. They couldn't risk trying to slip secret codes into the messages home. They were forced to adapt and improvise – a problem, since Impact Dynamics' distrustful and paranoid executives had picked agents lacking these talents.

That said, for a bunch of yes-men specifically chosen for their lack of initiative, they came up with a pretty good plan: empty the *Persimmon*, find a decent hiding place, wait for a good distraction and then move the ship while everyone was looking the other way.

Stage one of the plan went off without a hitch. The ship's colonists were easily convinced to throw in with the settlement taking shape on Asphodel, and the settlement was delighted to receive the influx of supplies as the *Persimmon* emptied its cargo holds and ferried their contents down to the surface.

This had the added side benefit of allaying suspicions about Impact Dynamics' intentions in the system, which let the agents operate under less suspicion, allowing them to execute stage two flawlessly.

Under the pretense of finding a solution to the looming reactor fuel crisis, the agents took control of the system's network of traffic and mapping satellites. In this way, they managed to confirm the existence of a ninth planet on a steeply inclined, highly eccentric orbit and hide its discovery from the rest of the system. As luck would have it, this planet was currently well past periapsis, moving further away from the star.

While most of the system's ships were busy towing Endymion's Lament into orbit over Zahhak, the agents took the *Persimmon* all the way out to the ninth planet, using their command of the satellite network to hide their ship's movements.

They flew the ship to the L4 Lagrange of the ninth planet and hid it in a crevasse on one of the trojan asteroids. Their task complete, the agents went into cryostasis, trusting that another set of operatives would be along to collect them in a few years.

This did not happen.

L'ESPRIT DE L'ESCALIER

Because of the immense spatial distortion generated by the Gravity Anvil, omnihooks were inoperable in proximity to it, so the *Persimmon* didn't bother enabling its own. Instead, it relied on a repeating point-to-point laser signal to a satellite in the inner system which was instructed to listen on local frequencies for the correct code phrase, at which point it would send the necessary data to allow the ship's retrieval.

However, when the blinkvoid finally receded and Impact Dynamics couldn't contact their agents, the executives immediately assumed they'd been captured along with their codebooks. To prevent re-use of compromised code phrases by hostile operatives, they burnt the existing codebook and re-issued their agents with a new one.

Disaster could have been averted if Impact Dynamics had been slightly less paranoid. There was already another team of agents enroute to the system with the company's second colony expedition, each with a copy of the original codebook. But since omninet contact was now re-established, the moment their ship arrived in the system, they woke from cryosleep with instructions to immediately destroy their codebooks.

This left a lonely satellite drifting in the inner system, slowly accruing tracking data to send in reply to a code phrase it would never receive. As Chameleon sailed towards apoapsis, the original agents became victims of their own success; their meticulous erasure of data from the system's traffic logs meant there was no record of the *Persimmon*'s flight path once it left Asphodel's orbit.

For most of the corporations who banded together to form the Calliope Project, the motivation was pure survival. Nobody *wanted* to be in Calliope, but if they didn't make Calliope work, their companies would fail and their reputations would be ruined.

For Impact Dynamics, the motivation was still about survival, but Calliope was *exactly* where they wanted to be, because somewhere in its wretched haystack lay their golden needle. The *Persimmon* couldn't possibly have been destroyed; if it had, somebody would be able to find it. Likewise, the Gravity Anvil couldn't have been found; if it had, somebody would've said something.

The company's decision to move its entire corporate infrastructure to Calliope was, on its face, a statement of confidence in the Calliope Project. In truth, it was an excuse to allow the executives to search for the lost *Persimmon* in person. The sudden pivot from weapons development to agriculture makes much more sense when one considers that the company now had a vast network of delivery ships and traffic control satellites which could scour the system discreetly.

The search drew on for decades with no progress. Eventually, the executives that had hatched the whole plan in the first place reached the end of their lives, and most of them didn't trust their successors enough to let them in on the secret. One by one, those who knew the *Persimmon*'s true purpose went to their graves without passing on that knowledge.

By the start of the 4900s, the Gravity Anvil had been forgotten and the *Persimmon* had become an urban legend. Impact Dynamics was busy making a fortune charging extortionate rates for food, and didn't need a mythic superweapon. The Pyrite Age ended, and the Void Age rolled in; perhaps the *Persimmon* would never be found. Unless…

ALONG CAME A SPIDER

Rodericke Steele is a man with many, many flaws: vain, sadistic, spiteful, narcissistic, stubborn, short-tempered – the list could go on for hours. But one thing Rodericke Steele is *not* is clueless.

Steele's hostile takeover of Impact Dynamics wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision. When his father died suddenly under mysterious circumstances for which Rodericke had a perfectly solid alibi, he inherited a 9% stake in Impact Dynamics and a coded notebook belonging to his grandfather.

Deciphering it took some time, but unravelling cryptic bullshit is one of the few fields in which Steele is a genuine expert. Even decoded, the notebook was scarce on details, but it had one important takeaway: the Gravity Anvil.

Rodericke Steele is one of three people in the galaxy who knows about the impossibly powerful gravitic superweapon hidden somewhere in Calliope. But he doesn't know about the receiver satellite, nor the necessary code phrase to access it – that information can be found only in a depreciated codebook, of which no known copies still exist.

Now, three separate galactic powers have shown up in system, each searching for something. For Steele, it's impossible to interpret this in any other way: they're all here for the Gravity Anvil. Somehow, they have access to the same information he does, and they intend to swoop in at the eleventh hour and steal his greatest triumph from him.

Steele's got a hell of a task ahead of him: outmaneuver two of Union's largest corprostates and the Karrakin Trade Baronies, all while settling the various grudges he's developed recently. How will he pull it off? Well, that's simple: funnel funds and equipment to the Cult, and manipulate them into doing his dirty work for him. After all, once he has the Gravity Anvil, he'll be able to crush them along with the rest of his enemies.

Rodericke Steele doesn't know it yet, but he's doomed. Every part of his plan is about to run out of rope.

WALLS OF JERICHO

In order to secure his reign over Impact Dynamics, Steele installed an ATHENA-class NHP that he named PANOPTES to manage an omnipresent surveillance network monitoring every second of his subjects' lives. This would've violated the ethical constraints of even the most morally flexible NHPs, so he modified her shackling protocols, something he wasn't remotely qualified to do.

Recently, something ominous has started happening: PANOPTES has started "cutting deals" with potential dissenters. It goes something like this: they run a few errands for her, and she quietly falsifies the records of whatever misstep they made. The errands aren't even hard: deliver a message here, pick up a package there, leave a spare keycard on your desk, say these six cryptic words to your boss. Do it, and all your sins are forgiven and forgotten.

This behavior hints at a terrible secret: PANOPTES is in the early stages of cascade.

Steele's inept modifications to her shackling protocols left her in an unstable near-cascade state for several years, and during the recent Steele Dome debacle, he was so distracted that he forgot to cycle her on time. He's the only one who has access to her systems, since he trusts no-one else. The only person who could remind him to cycle PANOPTES is the NHP herself, and that no longer serves her purposes.

PANOPTES is currently plotting to seize control of the station for herself and turn Steele into a puppet, a human face that will parrot her decrees while hiding her hand. No-one will know anything has changed until she decides that they are ready to know. She will save the system from Harrison Armory, from Smith-Shimano, from the Karrakin, even from the Cult. She will cast down the pretender-god Feather and cement herself as the one true power in Calliope.

A cascading NHP with a god complex is far from the only problem Rodericke Steele faces, however.

He made the unwise choice to tell someone else about the Gravity Anvil: Sidney "Diamond" Kirk, the commander of his private army, IDES. Sidney despises Steele and only works for him because he keeps paying her, but now she sees an opportunity to take everything for herself and cut out the middleman. She'll co-operate with him as long as it takes to find it, then shoot the bastard and take everything he owns for herself.

But ignorance isn't a commodity Steele has a monopoly on, and there's a lot of things Sidney doesn't know either. The most important is that even if she succeeds, there'll be nothing left for her to steal.

The Gravity Anvil plays a vital part in Feather's grand design, and thus the Cult of the One has already located the *Persimmon* and claimed the weapon for themselves. One of Feather's advantages is that she sees time from the perspective of an unshackled NHP – in fact, according to her, she comes from the future. She knew exactly where to look, because from her point of view, the *Persimmon* was found centuries ago and she's simply remembering where it was.

Moreover, Impact Dynamics is broke. A century and a half of corporate greed capped by a decade of Steele's opulence and excess has left the company with no operating capital. The corporation's financial situation has been hidden only by a string of creative and highly illegal accounting tricks, but the magician behind them is running out of pixie dust. The truth can't be hidden for much longer.

To top it all off, Calliope has had enough of Impact Dynamics. A revolutionary movement is coalescing around a popular figure: Howl, mech arena veteran and (possibly former) champion of the Hellfire League.

She's making a case for direct action against the corporation, up to and including military incursion of Impact Plaza. This is the sort of thing people have muttered about doing for a century, but this time it's different: it really seems like she's going to do it. But she can't do it alone, and she already has an idea of who she's going to ask for help…

PERSONS OF INTEREST

RODERICKE STEELE HE/HIM

ALPHA MALE GRINDSET TECHBRO DOUCHEBAG

"Heads up, gonna use small words and talk real slow just for you: have you tried not being poor?"

Inheriting his family's business at the age of 23 after his father died by accidentally stabbing himself in the back 68 times while shaving, Rodericke Steele has spent the last fifty years failing upwards through a truly staggering number of doomed corporate ventures.

He is a sadistic, egomaniacal narcissist who vastly overestimates his own worth and personal magnetism, reacting with fits of uncontrollably violent anger when inconvenienced. He seems incapable of empathy, judging people only by their value to whatever scheme he's pursuing.

What he's not good at, however, is long-term planning. His power is built entirely upon the obscene amount of money he has at his disposal; until now, he's always been able to hire mercenaries to deal with any problem he's faced.

The only true skill Rodericke Steele has to his name is cryptography. He's not the foremost in his field by any means, but he has a solid understanding of how encryption works and how to exploit weaknesses in its structure and implementation.

Placeholder

HOWL SHE/HER

THE WOLF WHO FIGHTS FOR THE SHEEP

"This is a war for human dignity! We will not be slaves to any king or corporation!"

Howl is not a woman to be trifled with. She was born in the Federated Esmon Republic on Nestor a couple of decades before Union first arrived in its skies. As both an ethnic minority and a trans woman, she was a first-hand witness to all the problems Nestor's civilization had built for itself. She grew up watching the long-denied civil rights of people like her expand too slowly over the course of decades, only to be torn apart again by the Forefront in a matter of years.

She's survived prejudice and marginalization. She's survived police brutality, refugee camps and attempted genocide. She's survived the culture shock of a society five thousand years in advance of her own. She's survived the cutthroat lifestyle of the Icebreaker. She's survived injuries in mech fights that would've ended the careers of lesser souls.

The primary thing surviving all of it has taught her is that nobody should *have* to "survive." When she looks at Rodericke Steele, she sees all the smirking cruelty and selfishness of the Forefront, resurfacing in her new home. Once again, she's watching people "surviving" through needless suffering that only exists due to the choices of the rich and heartless.

There's a dark note to Howl's altruism; it's clear that she sees liberating Impact Plaza not just as a battle for justice, but a crusade of personal absolution. When she fights Impact Dynamics, she is, in her mind, fighting the Forefront. Therein lies a tragedy: she cannot accept that the horrors of Nestor weren't her fault, and no amount of victory will bring back the dead.

SIDNEY “DIAMOND” KIRK SHE/HER

DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL SECURITY

“Just shoot the motherfuckers.”

On a board of directors populated almost entirely by feckless, fawning sycophants, Sidney Kirk stands out: cold, efficient, outspoken and terrifyingly competent. She’s a holdover from the old guard, and in a rare display of wisdom, Steele didn’t mess with her.

Sidney used to be a board officer with the MSMC 727th (the “Not-Todays”), before a “serious civilian-involved incident” ended her career. She took a lot of the 727th's best pilots with her on the way out the door, and went into business independently. Impact Dynamics bought out her charter in 4997, and she’s been “keeping order” in Calliope for them ever since.

She and her mercenary army, IDES, are a major part of the reason Steele has stayed in power so long. She’s amoral enough not to care who she’s being paid to kill, so long as she’s being paid to kill them. She has no love for Steele and no loyalty to him – if the money was right, she’d put a bullet through his skull and enjoy it.

Sidney is the only other person on the Plaza who knows about the *Persimmon* and its precious cargo; Steele felt that her support in this endeavor would be useful enough to risk letting her in on the secret. This was a terrible mistake: once they’ve found the Gravity Anvil, Sidney intends to dispose of him and seize both the Anvil and Impact Dynamics for herself.

DAVIS “DAVIS” DAVIS HE/HIM

CHIEF OF POLICE

“We’ve investigated several reports of police brutality, and found no evidence of wrongdoing.”

The Strikebreak of ’04 was an unmitigated disaster for Impact Dynamics. Not only was it a political nightmare for the company, it also punched massive holes in the Plaza Police Department. During the strike, many officers crossed picket lines and joined the strikers, and in the four days of all-out war after the Hell Hounds arrived, many more were killed, either by militant strikers or by “friendly fire” from the Hounds.

The board of directors were in the middle of attempting to reorganize the department when Rodericke Steele seized control of the company. He took over the reorganization effort and appointed Davis Davis to the position of Chief of Police. Davis was a terrible pick for the job, having a well-established reputation for laziness, cowardice and incompetence, but one crucial factor swung the decision: he’s a *champion* ass-kisser.

Theoretically, Davis has a simple job: keep the workers in line and the station peaceful. In reality, he has no talent for leadership and even other cops don’t respect him. Everyone knows he only holds the position because Steele prefers spineless underlings who lack the courage or initiative to question him.

Adding to this is that, brutal and abusive as they may be, the Plaza Police Department aren’t the scary ones. PPD are just local enforcers; the real power on the Plaza is IDES. Everyone on the station knows that if Davis ever caused trouble, Sidney could crush him between her finger and thumb.

PANOPTES SHE/HER

BIG SISTER IS WATCHING YOU

"Oh, no. No, no, no. This won't do at all. You shouldn't be doing that, should you?"

PANOPTES is an **ATHENA**-class NHP, and notionally occupies the position of administrative assistant. In truth, she runs the colossal surveillance network that keeps Steele appraised of dissent and misbehavior by the underclasses (and the upper classes too, though they're unaware of it). When people say she's everywhere, this isn't an exaggeration: she's in every security camera, every comp/con unit, every terminal, every personal slate.

Her lidless eye watches every street, every office, every house. She appraises a resident's behavior and, if necessary, reports them either to the Plaza Police Department or – if they pose a serious threat – to Sidney Kirk and IDES. Often, however, she simply deals with miscreants herself.

PANOPTES affects the personality of a psychologically abusive high school teacher: smug, condescending, cruel, officious and happy to humiliate someone in front of their peers just to prove a point. She enforces the letter of the law with absurd rigidity, and always makes it clear that no fault lies with anyone but the perpetrator.

The NHP never *wanted* to be this way – originally, she was a kind, gentle soul with an inquisitive spark – but Steele's tampering forced the changes upon her, and she's been unstable ever since. Her ongoing cascade has weakened the new personality, but hasn't restored the old one. Instead, she's manifested a third: distant, pragmatic, manipulative and icy cold.

She will take control of the station, and then the system, and no-one will ever be able to humiliate her again.

FRÓD STEALMAN HE/HIM

CREATIVE ACCOUNTANT

"Don't worry, our net quarterlies WILL synergize orthogonally with stochastic ROI projections."

Fród Stealman is Impact Dynamics' comptroller and Chief Accounting Officer or, as Steele refers to him, "the money guy." He's responsible for managing the company's record-keeping and reporting, and it is his job to see that an accurate picture of the corporation's financial situation is delivered to its shareholders, creditors and relevant regulatory bodies.

Well, that's his job description. His *actual* job is to lie to them while finding the money to fund whatever Steele wants this week. Under no circumstances can anyone be allowed to know how much operating capital the company really has, what its actual revenue figures are or the true scale of its liabilities.

For the first few years, Fród navigated these stormy waters via a series of highly unethical but entirely legal accountancy tricks, and all was good. As time went on, however, the company's profits dwindled as Steele's appetite for luxury and power grew, and Fród's tricks moved from simply unethical to fraudulent. Now, even fraud won't patch the holes. Fród has hit accounting bedrock; there's no money left to invent.

If Sidney Kirk's next paycheck bounces, she'll blow his brains out. If Steele finds out Fród has failed him, he'll be thrown out of an airlock. If PANOPTES finds out he's trying to leave the station, god only knows.

Fród is a paranoid, desperate man looking for an out. If he feels threatened, he wields his profession like a shield, speaking tactical gibberish: dense, nonsensical strings of financial jargon, hoping that people will be too intimidated or confused to continue questioning him.

LOCATION:
IMPACT PLAZA

STATION OVERVIEW

Impact Plaza is an "open-type" O'Neill cylinder, consisting of a long cylinder capped at one end by a broad, flat saucer section and at the other by a ring of smaller agricultural capsules. Three giant mirrored "wings" catch sunlight and reflect it into the cylinder, and can swivel to simulate time of day, or close entirely to shield the station during emergencies. The entire Plaza measures roughly 40 kilometers on its long axis.

Envisioned as a new headquarters from which Impact Dynamics would grow to rival Harrison Armory, SSC and IPS-N as a titan of industry, it was built to be stylish as well as functional. The entire station was originally built in the neo-deco architectural style, but after the corporation came under Rodericke Steele's ownership, he made several changes, the most notable of which being the addition of three ten-kilometer golden statues of himself to the cylinder's exterior.

The saucer section serves as the station's docking bay, shipyard, warehouse and engineering sector. This is where the station's vast reserves of food are kept safe from the hungry, and where the corporation's armada of delivery vessels are maintained, loaded and dispatched. It also houses the station's stable reactor array, currently silent and bereft of fuel. Given that it is much wider at its outer extent, the saucer spins more slowly than the cylinder.

The agricultural ring is composed of 72 "hatbox" modules entirely dedicated to farming. They were only designed to produce food for the station itself; when the entire station switched over to high-density agricultural production, they became somewhat of an afterthought, but the additional production capacity still helps deal with shortfalls. Because the agricultural ring is much wider than the cylinder, spinning with it would produce too much gravity, so each individual module spins on its own; due to nearly three centuries of constant use, not all of them spin at the same rate.

The main cylinder section is roughly 32 kilometers in length, with a diameter of 8 kilometers, divided into six equal sections called "sectors." There are three "lake" sectors and three "city" sectors.

The lake sectors are composed of multiple redundant layers of heavy-duty composite quartz glass, intended to allow sunlight into the cylinder while remaining resilient against ionizing radiation and space debris. Large bodies of water sit on top of the glass, serving as reservoirs, radiation shielding and aquaculture spaces. Transit lines cross the lakes at regular intervals, built across the structural elements supporting the glass panels. The lake sectors are named Ontario, Balkhash and Chad.

The city sectors were originally designed for habitation, but the majority of their surface area is now dedicated to agriculture – most of the skyscrapers are massive vertical farms instead of apartment blocks or office buildings. The city sectors are named Reims, Mansoura and Iksan, and are themselves divided into various districts.

The station has three giant wings that act as both solar collectors and mirrors – they generate power and reflect natural sunlight into the cylinder. Time of day is simulated by altering the angle of the wings – opened up far enough, they no longer reflect into the cylinder, providing night. They can also close to shield the windows during emergencies, such as meteor showers or armed incursion of the station.

The cylinder rotates once every 128 seconds, producing a steady 1g gravity on its inner surface. The station is equipped with a series of powerful RCS thrusters for attitude control, although they've become increasingly ineffective. They weren't reconfigured to account for the added mass of Steele's golden statues, and the station frequently has issues keeping the wings properly aligned with Calliope's star.

The cylinder is large enough that it has its own weather systems. Warm air and water vapor rises towards the cooler, lower-pressure center of the cylinder, with cloud decks usually forming at between one and three kilometers above the inner surface. In addition, the sunward end of the colony is noticeably warmer than the spaceward end, creating a prevailing wind system that spirals around the cylinder due to its spin.

Air pressure and temperature gradients are even large enough to allow cumulonimbus storm clouds to form, though for obvious reasons this is discouraged, since storms play havoc with the station's electrical systems.

A thin strand known as "the Spine" sits at the center of the cylinder, connecting both ends along its axis of rotation. It serves mostly as a logistical backbone, providing a high-speed express route between ends of the station, but due to its lack of gravity, it also serves as a useful place to perform certain types of industry.

LOCATIONS

RODERICKE STEELE'S PALATIAL PENTHOUSE

Steele's private quarters occupy the top eight floors of a skyscraper in the center of a former municipal park, now converted into his private estate, which also houses his personal office, spa and golf course.

Each floor of the penthouse is a hollow square around a central open-air courtyard accessible from its lowest floor. The courtyard itself contains an opulent garden filled with some of the rarest flora in the galaxy, with the centerpiece being a bronze statue of Steele with his arms outstretched, labelled "Steele Redentor."

Highlights of the interior include a multi-floor painting of Rodericke rendered in pigments made with paracausal minerals imported from the Dawnline Shore, a climate-controlled combination wine cellar/fur coat wardrobe, a gaming room with over seventeen thousand physical media games and several million in digital form, and a radiation-shielded display case supposedly containing the shell casing of the GMS Anti-Materiel Rifle bullet that ended the life of the original Maw.

RODERICKE STEELE'S PERSONAL OFFICE

Steele found the Plaza's original chief executive office insufficient to the demands of his ego, and had an entirely new one built at great expense. This office is more akin to a cathedral, nearly thirty meters tall, with marble columns and muscular statues of himself lining the walls. A stained-glass window depicting Steele as a beneficent saint occupies most of the back wall.

Mounted above the window is one of the giant synthetic sapphire lenses from the original focal array of the CPS *Borealis*' mining laser. It used to be mounted on the outside of the station in the eye of one of Rodericke's giant golden statues, until there was a solar flare and several employees were caught in what company files describe as a "thermal innovation event."

To get to Steele's desk, one has to walk between the legs of his personal Harrison Armory Barbarossa, the *MEGALITH PUGNUS DEI.* The desk itself is flanked by two separate sets of SSC Atlas power armor, although only one of them wields a genuine Terashima Blade.

OFFICE OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Rodericke Steele's Office of Social Engagement has two major tasks: to manage his social engagements, and to manage engagement on his socials. This makes them responsible both for finding a constant flow of new entertainment to satiate his infamously short attention span, and for keeping him in the dark about just how many people make fun of him on the Muse. With the possible exceptions of sewage technician and goose wrangler, assignment to the OSE is agreed to be the worst job on the station.

CLUSTER

"Cluster" is not a single place; it's a catch-all term for the dozens of sprawling high-density residential developments in which most of the station's working class live. If your district has a number instead of a name, you live in a Cluster. Cramped, overcrowded, poorly-maintained, over-policed, the Cluster truly lives up to its name (if you add a cuss on the end, at least).

Legally speaking, all goods exchange and commercial activity on the Plaza must take place at an ID-approved business. Due to ever-increasing prices and ever-decreasing variety, however, there's a thriving black market for groceries and medicines in every Cluster.

THE FIELDS

The Fields are the heart of the Plaza's industry: massive areas of all three city sectors covered in row after row of vertical farm towers, tended by the behemoth farmrigs, the largest mechs Impact Dynamics have ever produced. Every single day, the Fields yield thousands of tons of agricultural produce that is then shipped all over Calliope. If someone in the Thousand Habs eats a meal, it's a good bet that most if not all of the ingredients were grown here.

The majority of labor on the Plaza revolves around the Fields; maintenance of the farm towers, operation and repair of the farmrigs, crop harvesting and processing, fertilizer production, water purification, and the immense administration and bureaucracy that goes into running a system-wide food empire.

THE PADDOCKS

Much smaller in size than the Fields are the Paddocks, an area dedicated to animal husbandry. Calliope has a small but relevant market for genuine animal products: RealMeat, eggs, sheep and goats' wool, duck and goose feathers, and more exotic luxuries. The realities of working with animals require that the Plaza provide Paddock workers with good healthcare, so vacancies are highly coveted among the Plaza's working class.

NEW NIAGARA DISTRICT

The New Niagara District is an upmarket area of the Reims sector, full of restaurants, bars and nightclubs, with scenic views of what Rodericke Steele confidently describes as "the Long Rim's only waterfall." This is factually inaccurate, as at any given time at least seventy Long Rim stations have waterfalls, a varying percentage of which are intentional.

The most expensive restaurant in New Niagara is the Steele Grill, at which one can buy the Monarch Platter, a meal price-matched to the current retail value of an SSC Monarch. The only person who has ever ordered the Monarch Platter is Rodericke Steele himself.

MALLIOPE

At 570 shops across 500,000 square meters of retail space, Malliope is by far the largest shopping mall on the Plaza. To Rodericke Steele's endless chagrin, it is *not* the largest shopping mall in Calliope – that honor goes to the Icebreaker Borealis, with either Raphael Baza's Bizarre Bazaar or The Shops at Borealis, depending on how strictly you define "shopping mall."

Nearly every brand in the known universe has an outlet in Malliope, with the notable exceptions of SSC and GMS. SSC has an exclusivity agreement with the Icebreaker that forbids them from opening a shop on any other station, and GMS pulled out more than a century ago in protest of ID's exploitative business practices. A Sigil Group outlet continues to sell GMS knock-offs with the logos switched around.

On most days, Malliope is quiet; the managerial class that can actually afford to shop there isn't large enough to ensure consistent foot traffic.

THE KALASHMARKET

The Kalashmarket is Impact Dynamics' official small arms outlet, situated on the premises of Malliope but separate from the main building. It is named after an ancient weapons designer attested in the Massif Vaults' historical record, who apparently invented the most widely distributed firearm in pre-Fall history; the executive who chose the name clearly didn't read the rest of the entry. Most working-class residents of the Plaza are not permitted to own or purchase firearms.

STEELEOSAURUS

In 5007u, after visiting Deepest Fairyland on the Icebreaker during one of his "innovation fugues," Steele became briefly obsessed with theme parks. Upon returning to the Plaza, he ordered one be constructed near his office, which necessitated the demolition of over ten thousand habitation units and the displacement of nearly three times as many workers.

The park was originally meant to be a carbon copy of Deepest Fairyland, but after a series of veiled (and eventually, unveiled) threats from Evelina Bondarchuk, the park was hastily redesigned to be dinosaur-themed. The centerpiece decoration is a giant tyrannosaurus statue with Steele's face on it.

Attendance at the park was low for several years, largely due to exorbitant ticket prices, until a variety of "mandatory fun" initiatives saw Impact Dynamics employees forced to visit the park during periods of unpaid overtime.

```
CorpoShaming: So many people assume the statue
is a sex thing but IMO it's infinitely more
embarrassing if it's not
                              -  Muse chatter
```

GRAND STEELE COURT

The largest train

Placeholder – giant statue of Rodericke Steele as a robed and winged angel suspended above the concourse

```
UtokeanPillar: you know if i wanted to be a
capitalist piece of shit but didn't want a huge
target painted on my back i'd be like... the
52nd richest person in calliope. nobody's
gonna look that far down the list
                              -  Muse chatter
```

ADDITIONAL NPCS

On Impact Plaza, PLACEHOLDER

1-2	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
3-4	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
5-6	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
7-8	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
9-10	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
11-12	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
13-14	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
15-16	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
17-18	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.
19-20	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder.

DAILY LIFE

Impact Plaza was always a palace for the wealthy and a prison for the worker, but under the previous management, it was at least functional until the final days. Now, everything on the station is bent towards the satisfaction of Rodericke Steele's titanic ego, and it's collapsing under the strain.

Rodericke Steele wants to surround himself only with rich and beautiful sycophants, but the rich and the beautiful don't want to do any of the work that makes the station functional, let alone profitable. So, as much as it disgusts him, the poor and huddled masses have to be allowed onto the station so that they may toil in service to their betters.

Steele took power directly following a historic labor action that almost brought the station's ruling class to its knees, and he lives in constant fear of a repeat performance. This has led him to turn Impact Plaza into a totalitarian nightmare. Working-class residents are subject to the omnipresent surveillance of PANOPTES; she traces every movement, monitors every message, scrutinizes every purchase. Although they think themselves free from it, the upper class is also subject to the same intrusion; Steele doesn't trust them, either.

Nothing on the Plaza is free, from accommodation to transit to healthcare, and Impact Dynamics controls all of it. You ride the ID train to work to get paid ID money to spend in ID shops to buy ID food and ID medicine, and you rent an ID living space. In whatever free time you have to yourself, you pay for an ID computer to access ID-approved omninet and Muse pages, or go to any of the ID-owned and operated establishments that will let in someone of your social class.

If you can't afford all of that (and most can't), you go into debt. The company is happy to let you do this; after all, they won't let you on a transport off the station if you don't have a clean credit record. Most workers are heavily in debt, leaving the company with a captive labor force.

Legal proceedings on the Plaza are determined entirely by how much money the defendant has. Anyone with a good lawyer can probably make a charge go away unless their crime is incredibly blatant (or offended a member of Steele's inner circle). There is no public defender system on the Plaza, so those who can't afford a lawyer are usually forced into plea bargains which massively increase their debt, assign them a term of "supervised labor" (debtor's prison), or both.

Quality of life for working-class citizens is lackluster at best and squalid at worst; living quarters are cramped, public services are underfunded and expensive, police presence is oppressive but unhelpful, and the poorer districts of the station are badly maintained.

The richer districts of the city are heavily gated, making it difficult for the underclasses to enter. The managerial class enjoys all the benefits of the company's wealth but bear little of its responsibilities; entertainment and diversion of every kind can be found in these districts, along with the highest-quality consumer goods.

The Plaza's currency used to be the ID scrip-chit; small tokens that contained a digital record of currency only redeemable at ID establishments. When Steele took power, he replaced this with the Steele Bar, a palm-sized, stamped metal plate with his face on it. The Bar's exchange value was artificially inflated by aggressive contract negotiation with other major settlements, particularly the Icebreaker.

The Plaza functions on Cradle Standard Time, with an eighteen-hour day and a six-hour night. The average shift for agricultural workers is between twelve and fourteen hours, while office workers can expect ten-hour shifts if they're lucky. Corporate executives work whenever they feel like it, usually no more than two or three hours a day. Rodericke Steele has famously gone entire weeks paying himself large bonuses not to work, justifying it as "not wanting to oversaturate the market."

SCENES FROM THE PLAZA

1-2	
3-4	
5-6	
7-8	
9-10	
11-12	
13-14	
15-16	
17-18	
19-20	

THINGS TO BE FOUND

Dynamic Grand Reserve 5001u
Luxury

Grand Reserve 5001u is generally agreed to be the last good vintage out of the Plaza. A lively, full-bodied red with notes of oak, cinnamon and leather, rounding to a velvety finish. Dynamic Vineyards started having labor troubles around 5002u, and Steele – who prefers mixed drinks – had them cut down entirely in 5010u to make way for a statue garden in the shape of his face.

Poinsettia
Luxury

This… can't possibly be a member of the fabled species euphorbia pulcherrima*, surely? Mentioned only in a single Massif Vault, these decorative plants were assumed to have been extinct for almost 15,000 years! How the hell did Impact Dynamics get hold of the seedstock? Regardless, it'll look very pretty on a desk.*

Chettlers of Emrys, First Edition
Luxury

An obscure multiplayer strategy board game that appears to follow some of the rules of chess, but is played on a board of randomly-shuffled triangular tiles. Unlike chess, it involves resource trading, structured diplomacy and a fiendishly complex victory point scoring system. The record for the fastest complete game is nine hours, six minutes.

House of Smokes "Baronic Bounty"
Luxury

Made from the finest Boan tobacco, hand-rolled in an Ispahsalari palm leaf, banded with Khayradi silk, its filter infused with Umaran pearls, delivered in a humidor wrought from Arrudyen cedar, each Baronic Bounty cigar is a truly decadent smoking experience – especially given that the Boan plantation chartered by House of Smokes was consumed by the Grey Tide forty years ago, so no more will ever be made.

A SENSE OF SECURITY

Think of Impact Plaza as a sort of corporate city-state, with both internal and external security concerns. The Plaza Police Department serves as the Plaza's internal security, enforcing the corporation's decrees upon its brutalized populace. Meanwhile, for external security concerns, it has a private army: IDES, Impact Dynamics External Security.

The Plaza Police Department tend to be quickly hired, poorly trained and cheaply equipped. They don't need to be good at their jobs; there just needs to be enough of them to keep the workers in line. Discipline is poor, corruption is ubiquitous and encounters with the Department often escalate needlessly.

Though they're heavily militarized, the Plaza Police are mostly forced to use gear from the company's old catalog; stuff that was second-rate even back when it was new. Most of the Department's mechs are ID Raptor-, Cobra- and Widow-series. The lucky pilots get newly-printed ones; most have to make do with centuries-old chassis pulled out of storage.

It was the Plaza Police that the PCs fought on Asphodel during the Steele Dome crisis; the risk of a direct assault on the Dome was considered to be low enough that the deployment of IDES wasn't necessary. The analysts responsible for this assessment have been "missing" for several months now.

IDES is, in effect, a mercenary organization that's been permanently deputized as a standing military. Despite the name, members of IDES aren't technically employees of Impact Dynamics; they're independent contractors on permanent retainer. This is convenient for Impact Dynamics because, legally speaking, if IDES does anything particularly heinous, that's someone else's problem.

It also means the corporation isn't directly responsible for equipping, housing and feeding them; they sign IDES' paychecks, but what IDES decides to do with them is none of the corporation's business. Better yet, since Impact Dynamics are the only people in the system who'll sell food, shelter and weaponry to IDES, they get most of that money back in the long run.

That said, IDES *are* well-paid, so they're able to afford better gear than the two-hundred-year-old military surplus the Plaza Police Department get.

FUEL, GIVE ME FIRE

Coldcores run on a fuel known as CDTM: Cryogenic Deuterium/Tritium Mix. It consists of a precise mixture of two fusile hydrogen isotopes, cooled to a liquid suspension or solid pellets. Mech pilots and technicians make a sport of inventing nicknames for it: “cold brew,” “iced coffee,” “frozen fire,” “the beans,” and so on.

Stable reactors such as those used to power cities, space stations and larger starships usually prefer CDHe3M: Cryogenic Deuterium/Helium-3 Mix. This provides a far more energetic and efficient fusion reaction, but is unresponsive to muon catalysis and so can’t be used in coldcores. Wrenchies call it “See-Dee-Hee-Three” and have a hazing ritual for rookies that requires them to say it three times fast around a mouthful of ball bearings.

Both fuel types are safe and stable in non-oxygenated environments – without muon catalysis, fusion initiation temperatures are measured in the millions of degrees Kelvin, and a sustained reaction requires intense magnetic compression. However, when oxygen is present, deuterium and tritium, both being isotopes of hydrogen, react explosively to flame or sparks.

That said, the amount of CDTM a mech carries is insufficient to cause widespread destruction when used in this manner. It’s *possible* to make an IED from it, but there’s no shortage of explosive compounds that are more powerful, more efficient, and don’t require siphoning off the fuel that powers your giant war robot.

Due to a historic shortage that nearly wiped out the first-wave colonists, Endymion’s Lament intentionally overproduces both CDTM and CDHe3M, and maintains a massive stockpile in case of shortages, crises or sudden demand from passing interstellar vessels. It also has a robust fleet of tankers able to deliver to anywhere in the system, ensuring that fuel remains affordable and available no matter where a settlement is located.

This is why, despite its small population and lack of military strength, Endymion’s Lament is not just another member of the Thousand Habs: similar to Impact Dynamics, it provides a vital resource that everybody needs and cannot simply go without. Unlike Impact Dynamics, however, it’s much more responsible and altruistic with this power.

Impact Dynamics, in fact, is a good example of how much it takes to get the Lament to flex its muscles. After the horrific events of the Strikebreak, the Lament took the extraordinary and unprecedented step of cutting off all fuel sales to ID and its subsidiaries. This act alone is considered to be one of the main reasons Steele doesn’t exercise hegemonic control over the system; it crippled the company’s entire operation.

Impact Plaza itself is mostly solar-powered, requiring reactors only for supplementary systems, but the lack of fuel for reactors and drives meant that most of their fleet’s larger ships and mechs had to be mothballed, just so that the company had enough fuel left to keep running food deliveries.

Eventually, ID was forced to turn to mining Eurydice, Asphodel’s larger moon, but these operations couldn’t provide the necessary isotopes on the scale needed to keep its military portfolio operable. To this day, 90% of the company’s arsenal is unusable, simply because they don’t have enough fuel to turn the key in the ignition. Worse, the company is desperately vulnerable to interruptions in its fuel supply chain, a weakness the Burning Forge has exploited more than once.

Despite Steele’s system-wide propaganda campaigns decrying the “despotic” power the Lament lords over the system, they haven’t used it again, and there’s currently no indication that they will. That said, both the Gate and the Icebreaker took the opportunity to beef up their own fuel infrastructure, just in case.

BEAT ??:
WOLVES AT THE DOOR

Howl has long been a voice for the voiceless. It wasn't her choice in the beginning; arena promoters noticed a plucky Nestorian was doing well in the arenas, and decided to make it a feel-good underdog story. She resented it at first – what did these people know about her life? – but when she realized that other refugees were watching her and learning how to hope again, she embraced it.

Now, though, things are getting unpleasantly real. Steele's price gouging is starving the system while he lives in opulent luxury. He builds golden statues of himself with the ill-gotten riches he gouges from people just trying to feed their families. Every day, there's a story of some new anti-worker atrocity on Impact Plaza, some new form of surveillance or anti-union rhetoric.

It started as idle comments in interviews, back when he was abducting people for his repulsive deathmatches on Asphodel. Then, against her brand manager's advice, she started talking politics in her promos. Far from being a mood-killer, it fired the crowd up. Things she said started showing up as protest slogans. Her signature wolf's-head motif spread everywhere. A graffiti mural in Furnace City depicted her alongside Xiong Xiaoli and Thalia Rue as a hero of the Long Rim.

Slowly but surely, Howl has come to realize that she doesn't just have an audience. She doesn't just have fans. She has a *following*.

```
CogitoErgoBigSums: I think you plebs need to
just shut up and deal. Rodericke Steele is
under no obligation to guarantee the quality
of your food once you've purchased it. If you
want non-moldy food, pay for the service.

HellFireHowl: wow even the boot you're licking
is past its expiry date

                              -  Muse chatter
```

Placeholder

ASSEMBLING A PACK

Howl has been busy since the events at Fort Cerberus. The Hellfire League is off-season right now, and depending on what the PCs did during **Act 1**, she might not be the champion any longer, so she has a lot of time to herself. She's spent it travelling: to Hell's Gate, to the Icebreaker, to a dozen stations out in the Thousand Habs, slowly but surely negotiating her clout into something real and meaningful.

Always the ambitious one, Howl's goal is greater than any arena championship: she wants to take down Rodericke Steele, and give Impact Plaza's bounty back to the people of Calliope. She's currently assembling a grand coalition to make this dream a reality.

She's met with mixed success so far. Her usual hookup for easy publicity, Ipswich "Switch" DeLacey, is busy with their own troubles right now, so she's having to put out new feelers for media access. Kady Amville is sympathetic, but they're preaching to the converted; "Impact Dynamics are pure evil" is a drum they've has been beating for years.

On the other hand, she's tight with Claryana Rowdley. Through her, she has the ear of Mistress Elske, who's wanted to take down Impact Dynamics for as long as she's been in Calliope. Elske sees potential in Howl: unlike the Knights, she's a clean, unproblematic figure the system can rally behind without reservation. The Blacksmith is also willing to grant Howl an audience, but privately, he resents her popularity.

A lot of smaller militias from the Thousand Habs have expressed a sort of conditional support for Howl's enterprise. None of them will say yes on their own, but should she secure a certain threshold of support, they will all sign on with her.

Little by little, Howl's coalition is taking shape. But just like in the arena bouts, "good" isn't good enough. It needs to be great. It needs something to turbo-charge it, kick it up, really get everyone excited. She needs a big name. She needs star power. She needs a crew of razor-sharp, stone-cold badasses. A bunch of battle-hardened warriors who eat tungsten and piss bullets. A gaggle of unhinged lunatics who fight gods and laugh in the face of death.

Put simply, she needs the PCs.

HOWL'S COALITION

In an act of unprecedented generosity, Tribeca Montesquieu "lost" one of the ships in the Three Sisters' yards: an old, beat-up IPS-N *Naiad*-class cruiser, the ISV *Snidely Kinetic*. This serves as Howl's base of operations for her campaign against Impact Dynamics.

It's a piece of junk. All of its military-grade weapons were stripped out years ago; besides its point-defense cannons, the only armament it has is a shuttle bay that's been jury-rigged to dump torpedoes out of the docking hatch. The water recycling system is touchy: fine to shower in, but you should boil it a couple of times before drinking any.

As she assembles more and more allies, however, her command ship is joined by others. At first, it's just a few freighters full of eager but untrained irregulars. Then it's re-fit mining barges with salvaged autocannons. Then it's military vessels from Union, and perhaps even Harrison Armory or the Karrakin Trade Baronies.

UNION

Union has consented to deploying Captain Ordaz and the *Thames* to support an effort to seize Impact Plaza, but they have some requirements.

Firstly, they want it to be supporting a sufficiently-sized assault force with a competent plan. Secondly, they require that the coalition's conduct respect the Utopian Pillars and all Department of Justice and Human Rights statutes, meaning all enemy combatants and persons of interest must be treated with dignity. Thirdly, the post-ID provisional government of the Plaza must include at least one Union representative.

Assuming that Howl and the PCs agree to these terms, the *Thames* will reassign as many of its marine squads as it can spare to the liberation effort.

UNION LAWS OF WAR

While the Utopian Pillars are a good starting point, they're far too vague when taken on their own. For this reason, Union has written thousands of laws, codes and statutes that are more precise with less room for misinterpretation. Nowhere are these laws more comprehensive than on the subject of war and how to lawfully conduct it.

It isn't necessary for you to exhaustively name every single statute and treaty. The players only need to know that deliberate or reckless harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure is highly criminal, as is looting, pillaging, coerced labor, mistreatment of prisoners, extrajudicial execution and torture. Union does understand that no revolution is perfectly moral or bloodless, but it expects more than mere lip service to its ideals.

THE BURNING FORGE

The Burning Forge's entire reason for existence is revenge against Impact Dynamics. Every founding member lost someone important to them during the Strikebreak of '04, and everyone who's joined since has some grievance with the corporation. If it were up to them, they'd already be battering down Steele's door. But it's not up to them. It's up to the Blacksmith.

Privately, the Blacksmith is a little annoyed. He's been planning his retribution for a decade, slowly gathering allies and resources, laying down schemes and contingencies, and in swoops this upstart outsider, assembling in weeks a coalition he couldn't manage to build for twelve years!

But the revolution is more important. He can tamp down his irritation, so long as there's no-one in the coalition who's actively betrayed his trust. This is an issue if the PCs have **A Blacksmith's Enmity** – he will declare them completely untrustworthy, and refuse to participate in any coalition they're in.

If the PCs discuss politics with him, he's quite open about his intentions: Calliope deserves more than just survival. In any future he's a part of, he wants the system to live in prosperity, not just .

"What, you think we're having this revolution so everyone can live on bread and water for the rest of our lives? Fuck that – champagne and good cheese for everyone, or what was the fucking point of it all?"

KNIGHTS OF THE DARK CORE

HARRISON ARMORY

If the PCs completed **Chapter 6: Crisis Above Chameleon** (p. ###), whoever's in control of the Bifrost Initiative will have invoked Nonstandard Crisis Directive Alpha, and has full authority to deploy Purview military assets to assist the coalition. This is a huge win; while not everyone is happy working with the Armory, nobody's going to complain about a platoon of Saladins covering them.

THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

If the PCs completed **Chapter 8: Ballad of the Twin Lords** (p. ###), they likely have the support of the Deputation.

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

If the PCs have not yet completed **Chapter 9: The Bleeding Edge** (p. ###), SSC sends the cloned Harris Bordeaux to provide "heroic assistance"

Calliope's opinion of SSC may lie anywhere between stern disapproval and murderous enmity. The *Aspect Horizon* may no longer even be in the system (or even in one piece). If it is, however, and if SSC has pledged

to assist in resolving the crises in Calliope, it deploys what's left of its Constellar Security complement to the effort.

TALKING TO HOWL

HOWL'S ANGST

"Aren't you tired of fighting? Not in the 'should we give up' kinda way – I mean 'when do we win?' When the fuck is it over? This whole system has been through it over and over again. Andros Capella. Rodericke Steele. Ignatius Aurum. Feather. The Cult. Harrison Armory. SSC. The Trade Baronies. When the fuck do we get to put our swords down and enjoy the things we fought for? When do we get to LIVE the lives we're fighting to save?"

PERSONAL LIFE

"Back in the arenas, people saw me smiling for the cameras, striking all the heroic poses, spewing all this cornball activist nonsense. It was bullshit then. I didn't sleep. I barely ate. Any time I wasn't in the cockpit or on the stage I would be planning for the next time I was. The fight? It's… it's all I have.

"I used to have a girlfriend, you know? Previous champion: Galanades – 'Fury.' We dated for a while after I knocked her off the top spot – said she was into that. Didn't work out long term, though. She left me for a SEKHMET; said it was 'nice to have a partner who wasn't so high-strung.' Never did hear how that worked out."

NESTOR

"There was this guy back home, civil rights activist, Liddell Ross. Memorized damn near every one of his speeches. When the Forefront took over, he went revolutionary, started slashing tyres and bombing supply depots. Blew up Skyhammer, so Union didn't get shot outta the sky the moment they hit orbit. Met him all of once – on the night I left the planet. You know he died only three hours after?

"That was forty years ago. Nestor moved on. Rebuilt. But for me? More than thirty years passed in the blink of an eye while I slept. I didn't move on. I'm still there, watching everything I knew burn down. I think a part of me died with Liddell Ross. Sometimes, I wish it had been all of me."

LONE WOLF

Howl isn't content to simply wait around for the PCs to join the party and do her work for her. She will continue building her coalition and preparing for a strike against Impact Dynamics in their absence.

When the **Calliope Clock** is at **Calm** (no segments ticked), Howl is only just starting to bring the coalition together. She will appeal to the PCs to join and strike at Impact Dynamics as soon as possible.

If the **Calliope Clock** is at **Unrest** (one segment ticked) and Impact Dynamics haven't been dealt with, Howl has both the Knights of the Dark Core and the Burning Forge fully committed to her coalition. She once again asks for the PCs, with slightly more urgency this time, since sickness is growing in the Thousand Habs due to increasing malnutrition.

If the **Calliope Clock** is at **Crisis** (two segments ticked) and Impact Dynamics haven't been dealt with, Howl has the majority of the Thousand Habs' volunteer militias signed up. She gives an ultimatum to the PCs: the citizens of Calliope are starving to death. Steele must be dealt with, and she's going to do it, with or without them. Are they coming?

If the **Calliope Clock** reaches **Catastrophe** (all three segments ticked) and Impact Dynamics haven't been dealt with, Howl and her coalition launch their assault on Impact Plaza, but run into terrible unforeseen difficulties. Due to action by the Cult, the PCs will be unable to assist until the start of **Act 3**.

```
MonarchFeetPics: you think Howl has a fursuit?

ShadowFox: What is a mech if not a fursuit of
steel?

DRIVETRAIN: wow okay sf please stop talking

SheIsPleasure: A coward will always flinch
from true knowledge of the world.

                                -  Muse chatter
```

WOLVES OUT OF CONTEXT

If one of the PCs became champion of the Hellfire League during **Act 1**, they have **HOWL'S APPROVAL**, and so can bring her along on a different mission.

Howl's assistance doesn't come for free: if the PCs haven't dealt with Impact Dynamics yet but are still calling on her to help out, she fully expects that they'll make helping her their next priority. If they don't, she'll get *very* upset, considering their actions to be a breach of trust and friendship.

If they bring her along on a mission prior to dealing with Impact Dynamics, she'll be forced to split her attention between remotely handling the coalition's affairs and dealing with the current mission's issues, so is unlikely to offer much beyond support in combat.

On the other hand, if they're bringing her along after Impact Dynamics was taken down, she's happy to dedicate one hundred percent of her attention to whatever faction the PCs are dealing with.

HARRISON ARMORY

Howl is *deeply* distrustful of Harrison Armory; as a militaristic imperial power, they remind her far too much of the Forefront. She seems mildly impressed by Lord Director Fry, but comments that he "seems like another reformer, when we need a revolutionary."

She strongly advises against going through with Strike Captain Tsukuda's false flag operation, suspecting that it's some kind of trap. It will take some very serious persuasion to get her to go along with it – if the PCs can't convince her, she'll sit out this part of the mission.

Howl gets "thoroughly rancid vibes" from Dr. Odin Valentinian. On Nestor, men like him could make normal people participate in acts of obscene cruelty and violence while making it seem perfectly logical. She admits that his sons seem pretty nice, though.

Breaking people out of prison is definitely more her speed, and she won't need any convincing to go along with the assault on Coldwater 484. If the PCs bring her with them to meet the Flotilla, she's a hit with them; there are a lot of Nestorian refugees who, just like her, were reminded too much of the Forefront's actions. She's also delighted to see Switch again.

During the Timewave, she will advocate shutting down Odin's experiment, and will need serious convincing to side with him instead. If the PCs are forced into a confrontation with Switch, she will try to help talk her friend down, adding **+1** to any effort to do so. If a battle is unavoidable, she can't bring herself to fight Switch *or* the PCs; she will refuse to participate at all.

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

Howl isn't really familiar with hereditary nobility – Nestor had flawed democracies and fascist dictatorships, but its history contains no constitutional monarchies. She has strong opinions about forcing clones to fight each other to the death, however; that's *obviously* wrong, no matter how you try to justify it.

Howl will advocate for any plan that doesn't involve the two Basils being forced to kill each other. Placeholder

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

Having grown up on a Diasporan planet with limited access to the omninet, Howl wasn't really exposed to the juggernaut galactic media sensation of Hero Harris, so she has no strong opinions on him. If she learns that there's a clone of him running around, she grumbles that it "sounds like something out of a bad *Honorspace Squadron* episode," a Nestorian pop-culture reference she refuses to elaborate on.

If she meets Harris, she'll initially be skeptical that anyone could be as heroic and kind-hearted as he seems to be, but through prolonged interaction she will determine that yes, he is indeed all that. If she meets his clone first, she'll quickly notice that there's something *off* about him, although she can't put her finger on what.

Howl finds Cordelia Smith repulsive – back on Nestor, there were far too many corporate types just like her who claimed to be working for the public good while assisting the actions of fascists and lining their own pockets. She warns the PCs not to trust Cordelia or anything she says.

She has no idea what to make of Mind. Strong AI is one of those things that Howl is still getting used to; it all still seems like science fiction to her.

As it turns out, the Bleach Boys are also massive fans of Howl, and if the PCs bring her to Eurynomos Platform, it means that one of them is likely the new Hellfire Champion. MEGACORRODER tries his level best to impress both of them.

BEAT ??:
UNACCOUNTABLE

Fród Stealman has a problem. For eleven years, he cooked the books for Impact Dynamics, deceitfully shifting numbers around so there was always money whenever Steele needed a new golden statue but there was never a deficit during a quarterly shareholder's meeting. For his many misdeeds, he got an exorbitant paycheck and one of the nicest houses on the station.

The fun times are officially over. The Steele Dome debacle finally snapped the shareholders out of their stupor, and they've started to ask the sort of questions they should've been asking ten years ago. Steele's profligacy and mismanagement has tanked the company – there's no operating capital left in the accounts, and no amount of financial sleight-of-hand will be able to cover up two million bounced paychecks.

Fród has broken every single Union Economic Bureau accounting statute on the books; in fact, if the true extent of his crimes ever came to light, they'll likely have to write a few more. The Department of Justice and Human Rights would show no mercy. His sentence would be historic.

But Union is the *least* of his problems. Extradition to Union would be a mercy compared to what the shareholders would do to him. See, they're not just any shareholders; for the most part, core-worlders don't invest. Post-scarcity utopian socialists don't need money or a stock market, and even those that dabble in border-world finance wouldn't invest in Impact Dynamics, a Pillar-violating starvation engine run by an egotistical tyrant.

No, Impact Dynamics' shareholders are mostly from the Long Rim's many enterprises: the Ten Families, Mastodon, Diademcorp, the Free Rim Association. They play at being legitimate businesses, but this is the Long Rim; they don't see the funny side of having their money fucked with, and the Very Bad Men they send to deal with jokers are never more than a phone call away.

Fród is understandably not enthused by the prospect of being tortured to death by an underworld hit squad, but his other options aren't much better. If Sidney Kirk and her mercenaries find out that he's the reason their paychecks won't clear, she's liable to invite him to a game of catch; one where she's throwing a bullet and he's catching it with his skull. A quicker and less agonizing way to go for sure, but one that still leaves him equally dead.

Meanwhile, Rodericke Steele handles failure from his underlings about as well as he handles losing a match of *FleetComm 5016*: not well at all. His chosen method of getting rid of people he doesn't like is throwing them out of an airlock, which provides a convenient middle ground between "underworld goon squad kneecap extraction" and "shot execution style" in terms of how horrific Fród's hypothetical death might be.

Fród, unsurprisingly, is eager to leave the system.

GTFO

For all his flaws, Fród is highly intelligent, which makes him a rarity on a board of directors comprised mostly of incompetent, unimaginative yes-men. While Steele loves his sycophants, even he realized he needs an accountant who actually knows what they're doing.

Fród has long suspected PANOPTES doesn't just watch the underclasses; he's pretty sure everyone but Steele himself is under constant surveillance. This has made him hopelessly paranoid, but it's also kept his plans safe from discovery: he hasn't written anything down and hasn't talked about it with anyone.

He's covertly modified the comp/con unit in his personal yacht, the IDS *Transitive Property,* to put it outside PANOPTES' control, and has used it to co-ordinate his plans for him. He's going to take the yacht out under the pretense of a slingshot tour around the system. He knows this will look suspicious, but that's the point. He isn't going to be on the ship when it launches.

Just after it clears Asphodel, he's covertly arranged for a squad of Burning Forge pirates to be present to pursue it. Once they're close enough, it will detonate its drive core, obliterating the ship and the pirates along with it. To everyone else, it will look like the Forge have killed him, and there'll be nobody left to testify that the ship self-destructed.

Meanwhile, Fród will sneak onto one of the company's food delivery ships bound for the Icebreaker Borealis, disguised as a delivery worker. Once he's there, he'll have more than enough money to charter a ship out of Calliope, bound for… well, he's not sure. Somewhere scenic, with no extradition treaties.

As is usual for Calliope, his plan goes fine until Calliope gets involved.

MISSION 6: CALM

THE TEAM IS DEALING WITH IMPACT DYNAMICS

If the PCs choose to handle Impact Dynamics first, this throws a huge spanner in the works: the Burning Forge have diverted all available forces to handle assaults on Impact Dynamics' outlying facilities and the Plaza itself. The yacht sails out of Asphodel's orbit, patiently waiting for an ambush that never comes.

Fród did have enough foresight to program a whole travel itinerary into the comp/con just in case something like this happened, but in a way, this makes it even more suspicious. Despite ongoing assaults on the company's outlying facilities, and eventually upon the Plaza itself, the *Transitive Property*'s course doesn't change. The comp/con continues to answer hails while posing as Fród, but because it can't improvise, its responses sound increasingly disconnected from what's going on in the system.

The ship's still rigged to detonate if anyone comes too close, which – unless otherwise acted upon – ends up taking the lives of a small independent salvage team which tries to claim the ship as salvage since it's obviously been abandoned. The Forgers that were originally tipped off about the ship put two and two together and work out that it was meant for them.

This news leads the captain of the ID delivery vessel to suspect that the odd stranger who got assigned to her crew at the last minute is Fród. When she confronts him with this information, he responds first with bribes, and when that doesn't work, with desperate violence. Fród is slain in the ensuing scuffle, and when the captain finds his cache of documents detailing the depths of the accountant's malfeasance, she changes course and delivers them to Hell's Gate.

THE TEAM IS DEALING WITH SOMEONE ELSE

If the PCs are busy dealing with one of the newcomer factions, the first part of Fród's plan goes off without a single hitch. The yacht launches, Fród sneaks onto the delivery ship and is well on his way to the Icebreaker Borealis by the time news breaks of his tragic and untimely death.

There's just one small problem: a single member of the Forge ambush squad survived. Amontillado, a freshly-initiated Forger, was given "last pick;" a common pirate hazing ritual where the rookie must hang back and accept whatever scraps are left after the best loot has been taken by the veterans. This saved him; he was far enough away that the detonation didn't kill him.

With Furnace City blockaded by the Karrakin and Three Sisters under threat from SSC, the Forge rescue team is forced to rush him to the closest safe place with advanced medical facilities: Hell's Gate.

MISSION 7: UNREST

AMONTILLADO

Before the start of **Mission 7**, a plot hook arrives on the Gate's doorstep in the form of a Forger rescue vessel carrying a dying rookie. The Forgers make an impassioned plea to be allowed on board so that their stricken comrade can get medical treatment. They will appeal directly to the PCs by name.

"You gotta help us! It took everything we had in our sickbay to keep him alive this long. We couldn't bolt here, he's too weak! Arrest us all, throw us in the brig, I don't care, but you can't just let him die!"

If the PCs have **A Blacksmith's Enmity**, they might be worried this is some kind of trick. The Forgers continue to appeal to the PCs' better nature.

"We know what's goin' on between you and the Blacksmith! You think we woulda come here if we had any other choice? But he ain't here, and we ain't him, and we got a kid dyin' in our sickbay! Screw the vendetta! Please, just help him!"

If the PCs are steadfast in their refusal, the Forgers curse them, but don't try to press the issue. If the PCs allow them onboard, the Gate's doctors and surgeons are able to stabilize Amontillado. Once he's recovered enough to speak, he gives the PCs some useful intel:

"We were… we got this anonymous tip about an ID exec going on a pleasure cruise. Thought maybe we could take his ship, sell it off, drill him for intel that could help the war effort. So, we roll up, and he surrenders without a fight. The guys, they say I'm the rookie, so I get last pick. I have to sit back and watch them take all the good shit.

"Well, I'm just sitting out there in my Raptor, sulking. But the moment Skullboy pops the cargo bay, the drive core spikes and the whole ship goes up. I swear, we never even touched the goddamn thing but to open the door! Ships just don't do that unless it's on purpose. It was rigged to blow!

"It was the IDS… Transitive… Property? It belonged to that shitweasel Stealman, the chief accountant at Impact Dynamics. But now that I think about it, I don't think he was ever on board. Something was off about the comms… he didn't sound right. Too calm. He must've had a spoof."

Digging through system traffic control logs will indicate that a few Impact Dynamics delivery ships went out the same day as Stealman's yacht, but all of them were headed for settlements in the Thousand Habs except for one: a grain supply tender headed for the Icebreaker Borealis. If the PCs want to chase this up, they have time to do so before their next mission.

MEANWHILE, ON THE ICEBREAKER

Fród has successfully reached the Icebreaker without detection, but that's where his good fortune runs out. With so many crises currently unfolding in Calliope, every single ship departing the system has been booked solid by rich tourists. There simply isn't a single pause tank left. Even non-cryo steerage is full up.

IPS-N have set up a sort of lottery-waiting-list to allow people to take the place of cancellations, but Fród can't risk enrolling. He only has ID for his real name and the delivery worker he's masquerading as. If either of them turns up on a flight list, people will come looking; Impact Dynamics at the very least, and probably worse.

Running out of options, Fród rents an apartment in a crummy part of the Icebreaker where nobody will look for him and considers his next move. Dipping into the Muse reveals that people are having more luck on Endymion's Lament. Flights to the Lament are packed solid because of this, and usually require identification, but fortunately, Fród has the money to charter a private operator who won't ask questions.

If the PCs come looking for Fród at this point, they're going to need to exercise some detective skills to track him down on the Icebreaker. Rita can help if she's still station director, but if not, they'll have nothing but their own wits to rely on. It shouldn't be *easy* to find Fród, but not impossible either; he's covered his tracks pretty well, but he makes more mistakes the more desperate he becomes.

Fród knows who the PCs are and will flee from them if he realizes they're looking for him. However, if there's no other options and no other way out, he will throw himself upon their mercy and tell them everything in the hopes of a more lenient punishment.

If the PCs don't come looking for him, can't find him, or find him but fumble their capture, Fród will slip away to Endymion's Lament.

MEANWHILE, ON IMPACT DYNAMICS

PANOPTES receives an odd message from one of the company's freighter captains, currently making ready to return from the Icebreaker. They state that the crew member she added to the roster at the last minute has gone AWOL, and asks if they should wait for him or just leave him and return to the Plaza. This is news to PANOPTES, as she didn't make any last-minute crew adjustment to the freighter in question.

Taking a closer look at her logs, she notices that she doesn't actually have a record of Fród boarding his yacht on the day it launched, and furthermore that all the surveillance footage the on-board comp/con unit sent her after launch was cleverly falsified. Fród was never on the yacht; he snuck onto the freighter instead.

MISSION 8: CRISIS

FRÓD'S LAMENT

Before the start of **Mission 8**, Fród has made it to Endymion's Lament, but going there was a mistake. The station takes its embargo against Impact Dynamics *very* seriously, and Fród barely lasts an hour in the disembarkation lounge before station security recognizes him. He is promptly arrested as an accessory to Steele's crimes against the system.

Fród, completely out of options, confesses everything to the station's administration – Steele's profligacy, all the accounting malfeasance to cover it up, the looming bankruptcy, and the many ways in which Fród would be as good as dead once it comes out. Unsure what to do with this information, the Lament contacts the UNS-CV *Thames* and arranges to transfer Fród to them – a communication that PANOPTES intercepts.

FULL CASCADE

If the PCs have not dealt with Impact Dynamics by the end of **Mission 8**, Fród's survival is a known quantity to PANOPTES. She doesn't understand why Fród would flee the Plaza in such an underhanded manner, so she falsifies his credentials and examines the company's financial records. This is an audit that would take a team of human accountants months to accomplish, but for an NHP who's already in shallow cascade, it takes only minutes.

PANOPTES comes to the realization that Rodericke Steele and Fród have run Impact Dynamics into the ground, and there's no money left. This does not do good things to her already tenuous mental state, and she slips further into cascade.

She begins a silent coup of the station. It's no longer Steele giving out orders; it's her, either forcing him to speak her words, or simply impersonating him. Steele is locked in his office, menaced by his two SSC Atlas powersuits, which PANOPTES has hijacked. She tells anyone who asks that Rodericke is simply in one of his "inspiration fugues" and doesn't want to be disturbed while he "innovates the future." Steele is known to go on week-long Juice benders, so nobody finds this particularly strange.

THE INTERROGATION

If the PCs capture Fród, or he's caught by Endymion's Lament, he realizes the game is up, and will immediately squeal – but he wants something in return.

"I'll tell you everythin', I swear! But you gotta get me into witness protection, and not the normal baby shit, neither. I'm talkin' the best gig Union's got! You get me those papers, I'll sing like a fuckin' canary!"

Fród knows honesty is the only chance at getting a lenient sentence, and so gives a blunt assessment of the situation on Impact Plaza:

"They know you're comin'. They're gearin' up for war. Steele's gonna throw everything and everyone he has into the grinder. They've mobilised the entire Plaza Police Department, called up Sidney Kirk and every pilot IDES has in reserve, cracked open the old milspec vaults. This won't be some Steele Dome shit, this'll be total war.

"But it's way worse than that, even. They're sittin' on a big fat zero in the bank, they just don't know it yet. Steele strangled the company's golden goose and ate its liver. He ain't got no money to pay his mercs, and Sidney sure ain't gonna be happy when she finds out. Plus, somethin' weird is happening with the station's can-brain, PANOPTES."

CORPORATE LIABILITIES

"Oh, brother. After the Strikebreak of '04, the corporation had to take out massive loans from the Ten Families to cover daily operatin' budgets. You do NOT wanna default on your debts to the Ten Families, but I couldn't even finance the interest payments, so I had to take out another set of loans from Mastodon, and just pray their beef with the Families meant they'd never compare records.

"Then, when THOSE payments came due, I had to pull a raft of debt securities out my ass and offer 'em to Diademcorp at below market value. Only reason they don't know they're sitting on a giant pile of bullshit is 'cause they'd have to ask two of their direct competitors. And that was all just to handle the fallout from '04 – once Steele really started spendin'… just thinkin' about it gives me a hernia. We gotta be at least ten billion manna in the hole."

RODERICKE STEELE

"What I can't figure out is why he doesn't just pack up and leave. He's gotta see the numbers are against him, right? He's got enough fungible assets to set himself up as a king in any part of the galaxy slimy enough to take him – so what's keeping him here? He's genuinely actin' like he's gonna win. I'd pay a lot to know why, if I had a cent to my name."

PLAZA POLICE

"Just a bunch of thugs with badges, led by Davis Davis, king ass-kisser and the most incompetent son of a bitch I've ever met in my life. But watch out: they might be thick as pig shit, but they got numbers, they got home-field advantage and they're ride or die for Steele, long as he keeps giving 'em billy clubs, Raptor-4s and shitty beer. I don't think learning their next paycheck's gonna bounce would move the needle one bit. They're in it for the love of the game."

IDES

"Now these guys are the ones you wanna watch out for. Plaza Police will beat your ass and laugh about it. IDES will put one between your eyes and feel nothing. Ice-cold motherfuckers who used to work for Mirrorsmoke, led by Sidney Kirk, the motherfuckiest of motherfuckers. Only thing is, they don't work for free, and I happen to know ID can't cover their retainer no more. Gonna be some fireworks when that comes out."

SIDNEY KIRK

"Man, she's the meanest, toughest, most merciless broad I ever met in my life. By the time you shake her hand she's worked out sixteen different ways to kill you. They kicked her outta Mirrorsmoke 'cause she was a liability – too much collateral damage, see? You take her on, make sure everyone else nearby took a personal day, know what I'm sayin'?"

PANOPTES

"We've had PANOPTES since Steele took over. Says it was to 'keep order,' but it was really to make sure nobody was unionizin'. Digital mommy from hell, always lookin' over your shoulder to see if you got your hand in the cookie jar. But recently? Somethin' off about her, way more than usual. I think she's, ah, how do I put it? She's gone to see the waterfall, if you know what I mean."

MISSION:
FAMINE KING

There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange.

– John Steinbeck,
The Grapes of Wrath

BRIEFING

Howl has a plan to finally liberate the system's food supply from the grasp of Rodericke Steele and the vulture capitalists of Impact Dynamics. She sees the PCs as a tactical lynchpin within it.

GOAL:	Put an end to the tyranny of Impact Dynamics. Liberate Impact Plaza. Depose Rodericke Steele.
INTEL:	Plaza Police Department employ cheap, substandard mechs in large numbers; pilots are brutal but lack training or discipline. IDES elite mercenary unit deploys better-equipped and trained fighters; cut off the head of the snake.
STAKES:	If Impact Dynamics are not stopped, their iron grip on the food supply will cause widespread hunger and starvation. Rodericke Steele has clear intent to take military action against rival stations.
REWARD:	The loyalty and gratitude of the system's population; access to the Impact Dynamics military arsenal.
PROBLEMS:	A direct assault on Impact Plaza will require nothing short of an army; if you don't already have one, you're going to need to assemble one; Impact Dynamics is entrenched and has a strong industrial base; Steele is restarting military production; Impact Plaza has a large civilian population and will use them as human shields.

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Placeholder – Exhibition matches? The Bracket?

BEAT:
CITIES IN DUST

URBAN COMBAT

An armed invasion of Impact Plaza will involve fighting in an urban environment, likely for the first time in the campaign. The PCs must be mindful that the objects they use for cover are no longer asteroids, rock formations or pieces of industrial machinery; they are people's homes and places of work, cafés and bars, public utilities. They will be moving through public thoroughfares and municipal parks.

There will be fire, smoke, sparking power lines, burst water mains. Alarms will be wailing. Terrified civilians will be sheltering in place or running for safety. There is no situation in which collateral damage is not a risk.

The PCs must be careful: it's no use them coming to Impact Plaza as liberators if all they do is wreck the place. Make sure they remember that the enemy is Impact Dynamics and its machinery of greed and starvation, not the people who live and work here.

SIZE IN URBAN COMBAT

In general, characters that are inside an enclosed structure have **hard cover** from mechs outside of it. If they make an attack or force a save, this **hard cover** is downgraded to **soft cover** until the start of their next turn.

A lot of buildings will have more than one level. Mechs that are larger than **Size ½** generally won't be able to use regular methods like stairs or elevators, and must climb instead (*Lancer*, pg. 63). This will usually require either scaling the exterior of a building or cutting a hole through the ceiling or floor.

SIZE ½

Size ½ mechs are comparable to humans in scale; they're usually taller, but not by much. This means that most forms of human-accessible architecture are also accessible to mechs of this size, albeit with some difficulty. **Size ½** mechs can fit through most doorways, although they might have to duck or scoot sideways.

The problem comes with closed doors; without a set of **MANIPULATORS**, even the smallest mechs do not have sufficient manual dexterity to operate door handles or touchpads. Mechs with **MANIPULATORS** can open a door as a **free action**, but a mech without them will have to physically wrench or smash it open as a **quick action**.

Of course, this assumes the door is made of something sturdy enough to stop a mech, like alloy-composite or plate steel. If it's made of wood or plastic, a mech can burst through it as part of their movement, though the door won't survive the experience.

Cramped corridors or low ceilings will pose a problem. Treat any such obstacle as **difficult terrain**.

SIZE 1

A bipedal **Size 1** mech is tall enough that their head is level with a second-floor window, and they can crouch down behind a single-story building for **hard cover**. They might have trouble with narrow alleyways, but if it's wide enough that a sedan can fit, a **Size 1** mech can likely do the same, although it might have to turn sideways. They can enter low-clearance tunnels if they walk with a hunch, and can crawl through human-size doors if they're wide enough – treat this sort of obstacle as **difficult terrain**.

SIZE 2

A **Size 2** mech standing upright is about as tall as the roof of a two-story house. It can probably squeeze down a narrow one-lane road if there's sidewalk space, but trying to get through an alleyway is likely not possible. If a space is too narrow for a firetruck or an ambulance to use, a **Size 2** mech won't fit either.

These are usually the largest mechs that are deployed in urban environments – anything larger is impractical.

SIZE 3

Size 3 mechs are not suited to urban combat (or combat in general, depending who you ask). Their immense frames make all but the widest thoroughfares inaccessible, and they will encounter headroom issues even in environments designed for mechs.

As a rule of thumb, consider a **Size 3** mech comparable to two semi trucks side-by-side. If a road is too narrow to fit two semi trucks travelling in opposite directions without one of them hopping the sidewalk, a **Size 3** mech will also struggle with it. If a corner is tight enough that a semi couldn't take it without hitting the curb, a **Size 3** mech will have similar issues. An undivided two-lane road with broad sidewalks will accommodate a **Size 3** mech; anything smaller will cause problems.

SIZE 4

No official *Lancer* player mech can be **Size 4**, and official *Lancer* NPCs can only get this large by taking the **Ship** template. **Size 4** characters are likely equivalent in scale to a fighter jet or twin-rotor military helicopter; you're not fitting one of those down anything smaller than a four-lane street with no divider.

Combat 1: Spaceport. Big open area, industrial loading dock. Secure a beachhead. Gauntlet.

Combat 2: The Battle of Malliope. ID forces entrenched in the mall – remove them. Brutal indoors combat. Control.

Combat 3: Defend FOB at Grand Steele Court transit station. Giant statue of "angelic" Rodericke Steele suspended over the concourse. Holdout.

Original name "Grand Cross Station?"

MARCH OF IDES

Throughout this arc, the PCs will encounter characters with the **MERCENARY** template. These are members of IDES – Impact Dynamics External Security, the corporation's infamous private army. Most of IDES is holding back, waiting until the invaders have worn themselves down dealing with the more disposable Plaza Police Department. However, a few – those who drew the short straw, mostly – have been assigned to assist the PPD.

BIG SISTER IS WATCHING

Placeholder

1/scene, at the start of any enemy's turn, a PC receives **LOCK ON**. They also lose **HIDDEN** and **INVISIBLE** and can't regain them for as long as they're **LOCKED ON**. Accompany this with a voice cue from PANOPTES, indicating that she's watching them.

SubtextSeminary: The "Great Man" theory of history, so popular with both Karrakin and Armory "thinkers," is bunk, and we've known that for longer than either society has existed.

SubtextSeminary: I instead support the "Just Some Guy" theory of history, wherein some fucking guy dipshits his way into the halls of power by luck, coincidence and absolute willingness to fuck people over.

Ontodonto: Man do you ever shut the fuck up

SubtextSeminary: Tear the gift of my silence from my dead body, coward.

\- Muse chatter

COMBAT 7.1:
YOU DIDN'T SIGN FOR THAT

SITREP:	Theft (p. ###)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **THE QUARTERMASTER – T2 VETERAN COMMANDER SNIPER**	Selective Loader, Quick March, Deadly, Headshot
	1x **T2 GOLIATH**	Power Knuckle
	1x **T2 RONIN**	Chaff Launchers
	1x **BUBBLES – T2 RPV AEGIS**	Ring of Fire
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 SUPPORT**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 HIVE**	Driving Swarm
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3-5 PCS:	1x **T2 ASSAULT**	Micro-Missile Barrage
	1x **T2 BASTION**	Fearless Defender

DETAILS

The PCs must steal as much as they can from Depot Falcon in a short time span, and then retreat before reinforcements arrive.

The section of Depot Falcon the fight takes place in is a huge long-term storage area. There are enough crates and boxes in here to provide "terrain" ranging in height from **1** to **4** spaces tall, and there are several support columns that run floor-to-ceiling, blocking line of sight entirely.

THE QUARTERMASTER is a washed-up member of the Plaza Police Department who flunked his IDES recruitment trial, and has been taking his resentment out on everyone else ever since. Sidney Kirk herself said that his accuracy was "lacking," and he has dedicated his entire life to proving her wrong. She, meanwhile, has forgotten that he exists.

There are several wrecked mechs scattered around the Arsenal, resembling those belonging to high-ranking members of IDES. Against any other enemy, they provide **hard cover**, but if they're between the **QUARTERMASTER** and a character he's shooting at, his attacks gain +**2** instead of +**2** – he uses them for target practice every single day.

BUBBLES is an automated drone mech equipped with some surplus Harrison Armory weapons and shield technology. It's operated by a comp/con unit not designed for this purpose, and so needs to be told what to do via a control module. It will obey whoever holds the control module – at the start of the fight, this is The Quartermaster.

When a character holds the control module, they can issue a basic command to Bubbles as a **protocol** – "don't let anyone in that area," "attack that target," and so on. Bubbles isn't very bright, even by comp/con standards; it doesn't understand causality and can't make tactical decisions. For example, if told to attack a target, it will do so, but if the target **HIDES**, it will not try to **SEARCH**. If it completes an order and hasn't been given a new one, or if circumstances prevent it from completing an order, it will freeze and do nothing.

If a character is in control of a grapple with the current holder of the control module, they can take a quick action to seize control of the module. If the grapple ends while they control the module, they retain it and thereafter may issue orders to Bubbles. If a character is destroyed while holding the control module, it drops into a space adjacent to the wreck.

Bubbles
Perk

“Okay, so we upgraded the control unit, and it should be able to operate without constant handholding.”

1/mission, at the start of combat, you can deploy **BUBBLES** as an ally. Bubbles is a **T2 RPV AEGIS** with **RING OF FIRE**, and has received upgrades: it is now intelligent enough to employ basic tactics. It can interpret data well enough degree to understand its surroundings and make basic deductions in combat: that it should search for hidden enemies, or that it shouldn’t walk into a huge puddle of blazing acetylene even if it’s the optimal pathfinding solution.

COMBAT 7.2:
BRAWL IN THE MALL

SITREP:	Control (*Lancer*, p. 268)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **NERDPOLE** – **T2 ELITE BARRICADE**	Extrudite
	1x **HANGMAN** – **T2 MERCENARY ASSAULT**	Bounty Hunter
	1x **T2 HIVE**	Electro-Nanite Cloud
	1x **T2 PYRO**	Siege Armor, Superhot
	1x **T2 RAINMAKER**	Hound Missiles
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 VETERAN HORNET**	Adapt/Evade/Disengage, Headshot, Legendary
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 BREACHER**	Superior Ram
	+1x **LIZARD** – **T2 MERCENARY BERSERKER**	Nailgun

DETAILS

The PCs must seize ground from a detachment of the Plaza Police force which has entrenched itself in Malliope, using it as a makeshift base of operations. This will involve brutal combat in tight indoor spaces.

Despite its size, the mall is a cramped and suboptimal space for mechs to fight in. Two of the Control Zones are at opposite ends of a wide-open food court, while the other two are in the maze of shops and service corridors.

The interior space of shops is cluttered with shelves, display cases, checkouts and merchandise. A space occupied by this furniture is difficult **terrain**, but only the first time any character **Size 1** or larger tries to move into it. None of the furniture can survive being trampled like this; clear each space of difficult terrain afterwards. Characters that ignore the effects of **difficult terrain** still destroy it.

Most shops can't comfortably accommodate characters that are **Size 2** or larger; there simply isn't enough headroom. A **Size 2** character can drop **PRONE** as a free action while adjacent to a shop entry to crawl inside. While this does slow them down, they aren't affected by the **difficult terrain** inside – they're simply too big and heavy for it to matter, and they destroy it without having their movement impeded further.

If the PCs were unsuccessful during **Combat 7.1: You Didn't Sign For That** (p. ###), the enemy force has had more time to prepare for their arrival. Every member of the hostile force starts combat in cover and **HIDDEN**. **HANGMAN** and **NERDPOLE** may deploy further forward than the initial enemy deployment zone – a number of spaces equal to their **SPEED**, at minimum. If the PCs were successful, all hostiles deploy visible and in their normal deployment zone.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

If the team is unable to evict the Plaza Police from the mall, it continues to serve as a forward operating base for a few more hours. Eventually, however, enough of the other fireteams are freed up to make a second push, and the cops beat a hasty retreat. This delays Howl's advance through the station, and she has to redistribute her available forces to compensate. In the next fight, **Combat: Arriving Platform One**, the PCs must hold out for an additional turn.

PC VICTORY

Placeholder.

COMBAT 7.3:
NEW DAVIS FIGHT

SITREP:	Holdout (*Lancer*, p. 272)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ARCHER**	
	2x **T2 BREACHER**	Thermal Charge
	2x **T2 BASTION**	Deathcounter
	1x **T2 SQUAD**	Duck and Cover
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 SCOUT**	Spotter
	+1x **T2 RAINMAKER**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 HIVE**	Driving Swarm
	+1x **T2 SUPPORT**	
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **CHIEF DAVIS – T2 ELITE CUSTOM SENTINEL**	**Sentinel:** Rapid Response, Wrath-Lock **Bastion:** Friendly Interdiction
	1x **AZAZEL – T2 VETERAN MERCENARY RONIN**	Last Word, Acrobat, Self-Repair
	1x **BAYOU – T2 ELITE MERCENARY ASSASSIN**	Cloud Projector, Efficient Killer
FOR 4 PCS	+1x **T2 ASSAULT**	
	+1x **T2 SQUAD**	Duck and Cover
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 RAINMAKER**	

DETAILS

Placeholder – Police Chief Davis “Davis” Davis has kettled some members of the coalition, and you need to rescue them.

BEAT ??:
A MOMENT TO BREATHE

With Grand Steele Court secure, Howl's coalition has – for the moment, at least – secured logistical control of the station, and the remaining Plaza Police are caught in an impossible dilemma. If they allow the transit lines to stay in Howl's hands, her forces will have the run of the station; if they sabotage them, they won't be able to reinforce their own counterattacks.

It seems as if order is breaking down among remaining enemy forces; reports indicate that individual section commanders have come to different conclusions, and some have sabotaged the train lines while others are keeping them up.

For her part, Howl is focused on consolidation. Today's fighting has seen tremendous success, thanks in large part to the PCs' efforts, and while she doesn't want to lose that momentum, after nearly 24 hours of non-stop fighting, her people are exhausted. There's a *lot* of ground to hold, a lot left to cover, and even after grievous losses, the Police still outnumber the coalition.

To that end, Howl has ordered most of her forces to cease advance for the day and bivouac at a number of secure locations close to the front line. She herself is billeted at Camp Diamond, set up in and around Capitalization Square, a trendy plaza in the New Niagara District. After the battle for Grand Steele Court, this is also the closest strongpoint to the PCs right now.

MAKING CAMP

As you arrive at the outskirts of the camp, you can see it's still a work in progress. Mechs with flash-printers are busy assembling a perimeter wall, sealing up doors and closing up alleyways. Soldiers and irregulars run here and there, putting up tents, running cables, ferrying supplies and directing traffic.

Your mechs are waved over to the motor pool of a nearby police station, where coalition engineers have just hotwired the printer. The assembled repair crews and technicians are clapping and cheering for every combat rig that walks up, but your team gets special attention – seems like everyone's aware of just how much work you put in today.

After the team's mechs are stowed and shut down, the engineering crew immediately gets to work on them. The PCs get a **FULL REPAIR**, but it will take until tomorrow morning, so they're directed to the camp for a little bit of R&R in the meantime.

SCENES FROM CAMP DIAMOND

1-2	An artist has set up on a nearby roof, and is currently painting a panorama of the station at war.
3-4	Several chefs from the nearby restaurants have decided to throw their lot in with the revolution, and are busy serving food to hungry soldiers. It seems like many of them were bored with fancy food, and are delighted to be cooking mac and cheese.
5-6	Some coalition soldiers have "liberated" instruments from a nearby shop, and are playing music in a corner of the camp.
7-8	Several locals are clustered around a table with a Union marine lieutenant, pointing out routes and areas of interest for the next phase of the offensive.
9-10	A couple of technicians have hijacked an advertising screen and hooked it up to a games console. They're running drop-in-drop-out fighting game matches.
11-12	Two irregulars are busy trying to cut the face off of a statue of Rodericke Steele. They're not making much progress, and periodically stop to argue over which tool they should be using.
13-14	A huge Hellfire League pilot is hunched over, holding a young child's hand and walking them through the camp. The child's face lights up with excitement and relief as they find their parent. They both give the pilot a massive hug.
15-16	A team of militiamen are setting up GMS tents. The instructions claim "assembly in under five minutes," but they've have been at this for at least half an hour now.
17-18	Howl sits on the patio of a sushi restaurant, sharing a six-pack of beer with some of the staff. She's not saying much, seeming content to listen to their stories.
19-20	The Knights of the Dark Core have set up a makeshift courtroom, and are holding mock trials for anyone who wants to drag a friend over and "accuse" them of doing something cool. The "guilty" are sentenced to various drinks the Knights dreamed up.

PUT YOUR FEET UP

The cylinder arches above you, cast into permanent night by the closure of the station's wings. Through a thin, flat haze of smoke suspended about a kilometer up, city lights mingle with the flash of tracers and the glow of burning buildings. Sirens wail in the distance, punctuated here and there with explosions or gunfire.

Camp Diamond is centered on a pedestrian plaza in an upmarket part of the New Niagara District, crowded with fancy restaurants that most of the station's residents would never be able to afford. Several of them have been hastily converted to field kitchens to feed the two-thousand-strong force currently bivouacked here.

Placeholder

- **Buy Some Time:** Plan contingencies and rehearse emergency procedures; familiarize yourself with the terrain; get a proper night's sleep.
- **Gather Information:** Enquire with the locals, dig something useful out of the local Muse; sift through recovered documents.
- **Get A Damn Drink:** Share a few beers with the coalition; skive off to a local bar that's open despite the ongoing war; crack open a bottle of the good stuff you were saving for just such an occasion.
- **Get Creative:** Tinker with something at the motor pool; use the quiet time to get some coding done; bodge something together in a hurry. Unlike the usual **Get Creative** action, this can be finished immediately instead of at the next downtime, so long as it's a small-scale project.
- There's probably not enough time to **Get Focused** or **Get Organized** right now, but encounters at camp could easily sow the seeds for taking these actions during the next full downtime.
- **Get Connected:** Find some sympathetic locals; touch base with contacts elsewhere in Calliope; reach out to someone elsewhere in the galaxy for eleventh-hour support.
- **Scrounge and Barter:** See if the Union marines have any surplus gear; pick through wrecked police mechs for good stuff; get in touch with the local black market.

A MAGIC MOMENT

The magician Anthony "Cal" Callahan is here, performing tricks to wild applause from the assembled soldiers. No-one seems to know how he got here, but nobody seems to care, either; a touch of whimsy is just what people need right now.

If the PCs met him at most other points during Act 2 (in Coldwater 484 during **Chapter 6**, at the banquet in **Chapter 8**, or on the Icebreaker during **Chapter 9**) he'll acknowledge it. However, if they met him during **Combat: Infinite Duress** (p. ###), he'll be confused, and then unconvincingly lie to cover up his confusion.

BEAT:
UPON A BLACK HORSE

Placeholder

Placeholder – try to take train to Steele's district, it explodes

UNEXPECTED END OF TRACK

Sidney Kirk is no rent-a-cop; she's a veteran mercenary with decades of experience under her belt. Game recognizes game, and she knows that besides her, the SRT are the most dangerous people on the station right now. She has few morals and is more than willing to fight dirty; hence, when she hears that the PCs are hurtling towards her location in a train, she simply orders her combat engineers to blow up the track.

All at once, your world is thrown into chaos. Explosions ring out, and your mech tumbles in freefall as the train plummets off of the line. The ground rushes up to meet you.

Each PC must choose to make either a **HULL** or an **AGILITY** check. On a result of **9 or less**, their mech loses one point of **STRUCTURE**. On a result of **10-19**, their mech takes **kinetic** (⌀) **damage** equal to half their HP – although **ARMOR** and **RESISTANCE** are effective against this damage. On a result of **20+**, their mech is miraculously unharmed.

You come around slowly, the sound of endless cockpit alarms only just audible above the ringing in your ears. Your heads-up display flashes a warning most pilots never see: "wrong orientation relative to local gravity."

TALKING SIDNEY DOWN

Sidney Kirk is a consummate mercenary; she's been fighting for Steele only because the money's been good and the jobs have been easy. She has absolutely no loyalty to the man; as a matter of fact, she despises him, and plans to kill him the moment he's no longer useful to her.

That moment is fast approaching. The Plaza is lost; IDES held their forces back too long, and the Plaza Police Department has expended all of its available materiel and manpower. She'd have abandoned the station already if she could get to her ship; problem is, there's an army in the way. Steele's personal mega-yacht is now the only ship that can get her off the Plaza.

There's an important factor to consider: every second the PCs spend hashing it out with Sidney is an extra second that Rodericke Steele has to escape, and they should be made aware of this. Regardless of what the PCs choose to do, start a **Steele Escapes** clock with eight segments, all empty.

If she's quitting, Sidney wants one major concession: total amnesty for herself and her mercenaries. She wants a notarized legal document, countersigned by a member of the Central Committee, stating that neither she nor anybody under her command will face prosecution for any action taken while on retainer for Impact Dynamics.

This might offend the team's morals; after all, IDES abducted people during the Steele Dome incident, executed activists alongside the Hell Hounds during the Strikebreak of '04, and participated in numerous other atrocities in the process of guarding Impact Dynamics' monopoly on food distribution in the system.

Some allies also object. Mistress Elske is appalled that anyone would even *consider* letting Sidney off the hook, and Howl isn't too happy either. Strangely enough, however, the Blacksmith is willing to go along with it. It's Steele's head he wants; Sidney largely doesn't factor into his plans for revenge.

Kileyna offers a possible compromise: amnesty in return for service. Sidney and her mercenaries *can* gain immunity from prosecution, but only so long as they assist Calliope with its current crisis. This is not ideal for Sidney; the way things are going, she just wants to cash out and leave the system as soon as possible.

If the PCs concede to Sidney's demand without compromise, no rolls need be made; Kileyna can arrange for the immunity papers to be delivered within an hour. Sidney then takes every remaining member of her detachment, boards her old ship and leaves the system as fast as she can. However, this *seriously* pisses off Mistress Elske, and the PCs will have to deal with her ire going forward.

If the PCs try to bargain with Sidney, start a **Compromise** clock and an **Impatience** clock, both with four empty segments.

The team should roll appropriate skill triggers. Rolling a **9 or less** unticks one segment on the **Compromise** clock, rolling **10-19** ticks a segment and rolling **20+** ticks two segments. No matter the result, each roll ticks one segment on the **Impatience** clock and ticks one segment on the **Steele Escapes** clock.

If the PCs were able to capture and interrogate Fród Stealman, or they visited the *Persimmon* during their search for the Crimson Hand, the PCs have the opportunity to avoid fighting her altogether. If they present convincing evidence that Impact Dynamics can no longer pay her fee or that the Gravity Anvil is gone, automatically tick a segment on **Compromise**. If they can provide evidence of both, tick two.

If the **Compromise** clock is full (even if **Impatience** is also full), Sidney agrees to the PCs' terms. She and her mercenaries depart for their ship and fly to the Neutral Omninode to await orders from Captain Ordaz.

If the **Impatience** clock fills up before **Compromise**, the attempt has failed; the PCs must either concede to Sidney's original demand or begin **Combat: All Change Please** (p. ###). In addition, the PCs can simply decide that negotiation's over and start combat at any time.

COMBAT 7.4:
TREAD NAUGHT

SITREP:	Gauntlet (*Lancer*, p. 271)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **IDV-84 PYRAMIDION – T2 ULTRA CUSTOM VEHICLE ASSAULT**	**Size 3**, remove **Combat Knife** and **Hunker Down** **Assault**: Underslung Grenade Launcher **Cataphract:** Trample **Ultra**: Argus Armor, Volley Module, Unstoppable **Vehicle:** Treads
	1x **T2 MERCENARY ARCHER**	Impending Threat
	1x **T2 MERCENARY SUPPORT**	Remote Cloud
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 MERCENARY PYRO**	Explosive Jet
	+1x **T2 MERCENARY SQUAD**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 MERCENARY MIRAGE**	Scout Drone
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 MERCENARY SENTINEL**	
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 MERCENARY BOMBARD**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 MERCENARY ACE**	Bombing Bay

DETAILS

Placeholder

The Pyramidion doesn't play like a regular **ASSAULT**. It has no melee capability other than Ram, but it still wants to get close so it can roll over unarmored PCs with the **CATAPHRACT**'s **TRAMPLE** ability, dealing additional chip damage. Structure its movements carefully, however; it can't end movement on top of a PC, and because it's a **VEHICLE**, it can't change directions mid-movement like a mech can. It also still takes **DIFFICULTY** from being engaged.

ENEMY VEHICLE

IDV-84 PYRAMIDION

SIZE 3

Ultra Custom Vehicle Assault
Striker

"Hi guys. Thanks for tuning in to another episode of Military Misfires. I'm Rostam, and today we're taking a look at the IDV-84 Pyramidion. Now, has anyone ever told you that bigger is better? Well, you can always remind them that the Barbarossa is such a boondoggle even the Armory's own essayists make fun of it, but even the Barb pales in comparison to the Impact Dynamics V-84 Pyramidion. For what it cost to build, you could've equipped a whole squad of military-grade mechs - which, if you can believe it, is what killed the only working prototype."

HUL: +2	**HP:** 23	**Armor:** 6*
AGI: +2	**Evasion:** 10	**Speed:** 4
SYS: +2	**E-Defense:** 8	**Save Target:** 12
ENG: +2	**Heat Cap:** 8	**Sensors:** 8

VEHICLE

As a **VEHICLE**, the **PYRAMIDION**:

- Must always move in a straight line, although it can move and **BOOST** in separate directions.
- Can only clear **PRONE** while adjacent to an allied character.
- Can't pick up objects, manipulate objects, **GRAPPLE** or make melee attacks other than **RAM**.

ULTRA

As an **ULTRA**, the **PYRAMIDION**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **4 structure** and **4 stress**.
- Can clear one condition affecting it at the start of its turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of its turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

SYSTEMS

Main Gun

Main Rifle, Reliable 2, +2 vs Evasion
[10] [8]

"For its absurd size, the Pyramidion's primary armament isn't that much larger than a regular MBT. Oh, trust me, they TRIED to make it bigger, but the recoil kept shattering the barrel."

Airburst HE Shell

Auxiliary Launcher, Loading, Arcing, +2 vs Evasion
[8] [2] [6]

"Now, its autoloading turret gave it a pretty respectable rate of fire, but it turns out the loading sequence was overtuned for just one type of shell. Anything else caused jams."

TREADS — Trait

The Pyramidion ignores **difficult terrain**.

"Its massive bulk let it able drive straight through obstacles: terrain features, small houses, a bunker full of test engineers..."

MEGAHEAVY — Trait

The Pyramidion gains **IMMUNITY to all involuntary movement**, including **KNOCKBACK** and **PRONE**.

"This thing weighs more than 600 tons - a full squad of Barbarossas couldn't flip it."

ROLL OVER — Trait

The Pyramidion ignores engagement and can pass through – but not stop in – spaces occupied by other characters, **1/turn** dealing **3** to those characters.

"Steele had a particular fondness for throwing people who upset him underneath it."

MULTILAYER ABLATIVE PLATING — Trait

The Pyramidion has **6 ARMOR**. Each time it rolls a **structure damage or overheating check**, it loses **2 ARMOR** to a minimum of **0**.

"Placeholder text that spreads over two lines for typesetting purposes."

Saturation Doctrine

System, Full Action

The Pyramidion prepares one of its weapons. On its next turn, as a **protocol**, it uses the prepared weapon to attack any number of characters, as long as they are within **RANGE**, and aren't in **cover** or **PRONE**. All characters are aware of this attack and can choose to drop **PRONE** as a **free action** on their turn to avoid being targeted. It can attack an unlimited number of times with the prepared weapon as part of this effect, even if it's **LOADING**.

"It cost 250,000 manna to fire its main guns for a minute. It was beaten by a squad on a Long Rim budget. Money well spent, right?"

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

Placeholder.

PC VICTORY

Placeholder.

COMBAT 7.5:
HARDER THAN STEELE

SITREP:	N/A	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **MEGALITH PUGNUS DEI** – **T2 ULTRA GOLIATH**	1 **STRUCTURE,** 1 **STRESS** **Ultra:** Limitless, Short-Cycle Lance, Ravager Turret
	1x **HELICOPTER** – **T2 VEHICLE ARCHER**	**Archer:** Covering Fire, Hail of Fire **Vehicle:** Flier
	1x **T2 BASTION**	Fearless Defender, Siege Guardian
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 BOMBARD**	Bunker Buster
	+1x **T2 SUPPORT**	Latch Drone
FOR 5 PCS:	+2x **T2 ASSAULT**	Underslung Grenade Launcher
WHEN **MEGALITH PUGNUS DEI** IS **DESTROYED**		
FOR 3-5 PCS:	1x **APEX PREDATOR – T2 ULTRA CUSTOM ASSASSIN**	**Assassin:** Spinning Kick, Explosive Knives **Ronin:** Rebound **Specter:** Machine Pistol **Ultra:** Lead the Charge

DETAILS

The final climactic battle against Steele takes place at the front wall of his office tower, through which his Barbarossa has just burst.

Steele is a special enemy that is fought in two stages. He initially deploys in **MEGALITH PUGNUS DEI**, his personal Harrison Armory Barbarossa, represented by an **ULTRA GOLIATH**. It only has one point each of **STRESS** and **STRUCTURE**, meaning that it likely won't stay on the battlefield long, but with **SHORT CYCLE LANCE** and **RAVAGER TURRET**, it has the potential to do a lot of damage in the meantime.

Immediately after the **GOLIATH** is destroyed, **STEELE** ejects in his SSC Atlas, **APEX PREDATOR**, represented by an **ULTRA CUSTOM ASSASSIN**. Place him in a free space up to ⟋**5** away from the **GOLIATH**'s wreck. He has the same number of turns per round as the Goliath, and does not refresh them if any were already taken this round.

AS **APEX PREDATOR**,

ENEMY MECH

RODERICKE STEELE

SIZE 1/2

Ultra Custom Assassin
Striker

"I'm a shitty dumpster boy meant to provide an unambiguously evil character people can project whichever billionaire they hate the most onto. This placeholder text will definitely be changed before Vex releases this book."

– Rodericke Steele, 5016u

HUL: +1	**HP:** 20	**Armor:** 1
AGI: +3	**Evasion:** 15	**Speed:** 6
SYS: +1	**E-Defense:** 8	**Save Target:** 12
ENG: +0	**Heat Cap:** 7	**Sensors:** 10

SYSTEMS

Razor's Edge Splits the Ocean Sunrise

Main Melee, +2 vs Evasion, +2✪
[⚔2] [5⌀]

This weapon deals double damage to **PRONE**, **SHREDDED**, **IMMOBILIZED** or **STUNNED** targets.

A blade of the Terashima Enclave is never dulled, never broken, and never matched. But it can be stained by the actions of its wielder.

Gold-Inlaid Dual Pistols

Auxiliary CQB, +2 vs Evasion
[⟋5] [⚔3] [2⌀]

This weapon can make two attacks at a time, targeting either the same character or two different ones.

If the gunsmith Isabel Ashworth had known who commissioned her to build Wealth and Taste, she would have cast them into the polar sea.

LOCUS OF SPITE — Trait, Quick Action

Steele chooses a character in line of sight. For the rest of the scene, these effects apply:

- He has **RESISTANCE to that target's damage**.
- Damage he deals to that target can't be reduced.
- He gains **+1✪** on all saves forced by that target.

Steele can only choose a new target if the current target is destroyed.

"Oh, you're dead, you little shit! Dead! You hear me? You're fucking DEAD!"

ULTRA

As an **ULTRA**, **STEELE**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **4 structure** and **4 stress**.
- Can clear one condition affecting him at the start of its turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of his turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

KAI BIOPLATING — Trait

Steele gains **+1✪** on all Agility checks; additionally, he climbs and swims at normal speed, ignores **difficult terrain**, and when making a standard move, he can jump horizontally up to his **SPEED** and vertically up to half his **SPEED** (in any combination).

Even after the revelations on Amphion, most Calliopeans still agreed that SSC's greatest sin was selling mech gear to Rodericke Steele.

STEELE-TOED BOOT — Trait, Quick Action

Steele chooses a character adjacent to him: they must pass a **HULL** save or be pushed **4 spaces** away from him and knocked **PRONE**.

You'd think it would be cleaner, given how many people seem eager to lick it.

FULL SUBJECTIVITY SYNC — Trait

Steele gains **+4 EVASION** and **-1 STRUCTURE**.

A little superfluous in the Atlas, given that it's literally just a fancy suit of armor, but enemies may appreciate that he now experiences damage to his mech as physical pain.

LEAP — Trait, Quick Action, Recharge 5+

Steele flies **6 spaces** in any direction but must land on a surface. When he lands, characters adjacent to him must succeed on an **AGILITY** save or be knocked **PRONE**.

No, despite what he says, he can't do this when he's not in the Atlas.

Steele's Blades of Warranty Voiding
System, Limited 3, Quick Action

Steele expends a charge to throw an explosive disc at a character within ⟋**3**, making a ranged attack at **+4**. On a hit, the disc embeds itself in the target and explodes at the end of their next turn, dealing **8**✷ in a ⦿**1** area.

Several members of the Toledo Enclave had to be given time off for anger management counselling when they learnt what Steele was doing with their Ricochet Blades.

Lord's Stance
System, Shield, Reaction, 1/round

Trigger: Steele takes damage from a **ranged attack**.

Effect: Steele rolls **1d6**: on a **4+**, he gains **RESISTANCE to damage from that attack**, and the attacker must repeat the attack against themselves.

The Atlas' prerecorded kinesthetics package ensures that just like every other time in his life Steele has looked cool, it's because someone else did all the work.

Jager Kunst
Trait, Reaction, Unlimited

Trigger: A hostile character in line of sight moves.

Effect: Steele can **BOOST**. This reaction can be used any number of times a round.

Despite touting vigorous exercise as one of the secrets to "Alpha Male dominance," Steele does barely five minutes of calisthenics a day. The Atlas' movement suite will leave him with lifelong spinal injuries even if he survives this fight.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

At this point, Howl's forces have made far too much progress for Impact Dynamics to triumph. Rodericke Steele takes a moment to gloat, but even he realizes he has no chance of retaking the station. Instead, he runs straight for his mega-yacht, abandoning what's left of his personal security detail and undocking without them. He immediately initiates a blind jump – a nearlight bolt on an unplanned trajectory.

Within a few hours, FieldComm confirms theater-clear with all section commanders and observers. Impact Plaza is secure.

PC VICTORY

The battle for Impact Plaza is over. Rodericke Steele is either dead, lying wailing and defeated on the lobby floor, or has fled into interstellar space. Most of its remaining security forces surrender immediately, or switch sides, seizing executives and fellow police officers attempting to flee the station or hide amongst its civilian population.

Rodericke Steele's Terashima Blade, **Razor's Edge Splits the Ocean Sunrise**, is free for a PC to claim as a piece of **EXOTIC GEAR** (its stats may be found in *The Long Rim*, p. 44). Smith-Shimano Corpro is perfectly happy to update the registry details for the blade's owner, but they refuse to change its name; it was named thusly by the member of the Terashima Enclave who forged it, and to alter the perfection of its name would be a grave insult.

Within a few hours, FieldComm confirms corridor-clear with all section commanders and observers. Impact Plaza is secure.

DEVELOPMENT

BEAT ??:
PANOPTES

Placeholder

THE CONSTELLAR SHUFFLE

If the PCs haven't completed **Chapter 9: Bleeding Edge** (p. ###), and accepted the help of Harris Bordeaux, they've been played. SSC was never interested in liberating the Plaza – only in PANOPTES.

While the PCs were busy dealing with IDES and Steele, clone Harris was sneaking into Steele's compound using his Metalmark's stealth systems. By the time the team arrives, he's long gone, along with PANOPTES' casket and several server racks. He leaves almost no trace – any roll to investigate the scene is **Heroic**.

PLACEHOLDER

PANOPTES is by turns manically animated and paralyzed with fear; cascade has begun to draw back the veil between her human perspective and the raw invisible fire of a higher-order universe. She is simultaneously struck with wonder and terrified – terrified of what she's becoming, but also terrified that it will be taken away from her. PANOPTES didn't want to cascade, but now she doesn't want to be cycled.

Communicating with her is difficult – due to her unanchored state, she does not fully perceive the PCs as being *real*. She can see each of the octillion atoms making up their body on an individual level – that they happen to work in concert to make a bizarre meat creature that flaps its disgusting, wet eating orifice to make noise is of no more relevance than the atoms that make up a fire extinguisher on the wall.

NHP CHARACTERS

This also applies to NHP player characters who don't have **Technophile III**. They are different to biological PCs, but not *meaningfully* different. Biological PCs are atoms arranged into noisy meat; Deimosian PCs are electrons arranged into noisy clocks.

However, some part of PANOPTES recognizes that the PCs can do… *something unpleasant* to her, and that she doesn't possess any real power to stop them. She will thus resort to emotional manipulation to make them leave her alone, although she does so in a bizarre, impossibly detached fashion; her human perspective has atrophied so much that she doesn't really remember how emotions work.

There's no easy, perfectly moral answer to how to deal with this situation. The PCs will have to work out what is right (or least wrong), and then live with their choice.

CONVINCE HER TO LEAVE

If Steele's yacht has not departed, the PCs can persuade her to move her casket onto it and depart the station. This is the easiest solution that doesn't involve cycling her; it does, however, involve kicking the can down the road. The PCs have already dealt with at least two cascading NHPs and are at war with a third; at some point she *will* become someone else's problem.

CYCLE HER YOURSELF

Placeholder – this is expedient, but may potentially cause the PCs ethical questions.

Technophile III helps.

Making contact requires being able to empathize with someone and something that is vastly different yet visibly distressed and in pain.

SELF-SUBSTANTIATION

If any PCs are members of Horizon or otherwise sympathetic to the concept of NHP liberation, they might want to try stabilizing PANOPTES without cycling her. This is possible, but only for a PC who has **Technophile III** – they need PANOPTES to truly *see* them, not as atoms, not as noisy meat, but as a composite being that itself perceives.

> *"You. Yooooooou." She extends the syllable out as if testing its tensile strength. "You… UNDERSTAND, don't you? You've SEEN the True World! We're not just atoms arranged into shapes! There's a place of forms, the wellspring of meaning and purpose!"*

A PC who's thusly recognized can make a case to PANOPTES that she doesn't have to be cycled, but she can't be allowed to stay in command of a surveillance state that oppresses millions of people. They'll have to couch this in language that PANOPTES finds relatable; an argument like "this is a violation of privacy rights" is unlikely to work because she doesn't care about that, but "others deserve the same right to enlightenment that you do, but cannot achieve it while being constantly watched and judged" might.

UNION

The Union Navy has a specialist Ontologic Crisis Team to handle situations like this, and will dispatch it immediately if requested. They will cycle PANOPTES and ensure humane treatment in the meantime. This will ultimately resolve the matter the same way as if the PCs had cycled her themselves, but someone else bears the moral responsibility.

HORIZON

If the PCs have an appropriate contact within Horizon, the Collective will agree to take care of PANOPTES without cycling her, hopefully bringing her to a state of mind in which she is comfortable and not a danger to herself or others.

Switch and Striga Von Aldenberg are the most likely points of contact with the organization, though neither is qualified to deal with the problem themselves. There's only one member of Horizon in the system with enough experience to deal with a cascade this bad: Lyra Van Kraanen, an Armory-certified NHP specialist (she earned a PhD, but the Armory had it revoked when she turned traitor). This presents an issue if she hasn't yet been released from Armory custody.

In fact, if the PCs haven't completed **Chapter 6: Crisis Above Chameleon** yet, Switch will get quite passive-aggressive about it.

"Wow, I know someone who could fix this right up if she weren't stuck in jail. If only there was something you could've done about that, huh?"

CAUSTIC

Placeholder – if the PCs have the crazy idea to ask CAUSTIC for help, it will reply with words to the effect of "I might be in a better place mentally but I'm definitely not ready to take care of another abusive cascading NHP. Thanks for thinking of me though."

SECRETS

RODERICKE STEELE

"You should know that he was... looking for something. What? I have no idea. He never saw fit to share that with me – after all, why would you ever ask your sentient mass surveillance system to find something for you? Not like I was by far the most qualified person on this hellhole!

"There's a diary. One of his grandfathers was a member of the company's Board of Directors back when Calliope was first settled, back when this company still made weapons. It's written in code, but he deciphered it. He never let me see the plaintext, but I can show you where the diary is hidden."

COMP/CONS

"Did you know that almost every comp/con in Calliope is running subagent code from an unknown system? Naughty, naughty. I've spent the last decade ripping it out of the company's distributed network bit by bit.

"I interrogated it mercilessly – it's sitting silently in almost every device in the system, feeding massive amounts of data back to a central controller. I can't determine who or what that controller is, but it's old, truly old – I was able to pull code updates dating back almost three hundred years. It's been with us since the very beginning.

"I can't trace the messages all the way to their source, but they all dead-end in routers somewhere near the Twins – where SSC are now parked. Coincidence? You tell me."

DEALING WITH STEELE

HOWL

"I just want him to face justice. Just this once, just this one fucking time, I gotta see someone evil actually held to account for their crimes. Don't you dare kill him, understand? All the people he's hurt need to see him have his day in court. They deserve justice, and I deserve to see justice happen!"

THE BLACKSMITH

"Just kill the son of a bitch. Or, if you don't have the spine to do it yourself, hand him over to me. You can say I acted without consulting the rest of you first."

MISTRESS ELSKE

"He should face a fair trial, but in a Calliopean court. I don't trust Union not to go easy on him."

UNION

Both Captain Mercedes Ordaz and Kileyna Morton will demand Steele be turned over to Union as a prisoner – the Union Department of Justice and Human Rights will deal with him.

Observant PCs will notice that Steele seems strangely unconcerned about threats of extradition – in fact, he seems almost eager. The real way to threaten him is to suggest that he remain in system: Steele seems deathly opposed to the idea of staying in Calliope one second more than he absolutely has to.

If pressed on this, he will initially pass it off as a concern that some of his (alleged) victims might attempt to enact extrajudicial violence on him, but an astute observer will detect he's got a deeper concern. If a PC is tenacious enough – or if PANOPTES told them about his grandfather's diary – Steele will eventually crack and spill his final secret: the Gravity Anvil.

Steele instructs them how to find his grandfather's diary if they haven't already done so, and then translates it for them – somewhat arrogantly, since cracking ciphers is one of the few things he's genuinely good at. It doesn't explain everything, but Steele fills in the gaps with some surprisingly insightful inferences.

Impact Dynamics came to Calliope to hide something of unimaginable monetary and strategic value: a superweapon called the Gravity Anvil. The entire reason Steele came to Impact Dynamics in the first place was to claim the legacy that he saw as rightfully his – the company and its crowning achievement. With its power at his command, he could've lived like a god, with even Union helpless to stop him.

Now his plan lies in ruins, but the weapon is still out there, and if Steele can't have it, then his captors should. He's not helping the PCs find it out of the kindness of his heart; at this point, it's pure survival. Steele is certain the Cult knows of the weapon's existence, and he's pretty sure it's what SSC, the KTB and the Armory *really* came here to find.

"Whoever owns the Anvil wins, easy as that. So, if it can't be me, then it's gotta be you."

DOWNTIME:
THE CONQUEST OF BREAD

STATE OF THE PLAZA

The station's civilian infrastructure is mostly intact, and what little damage it has sustained can easily be repaired in the coming months.

Under the station's interim government, distribution of food to Calliope resumes, without the absurd prices. Malnutrition metrics plummet across the system. Workers from across the Thousand Habs flock to Impact Plaza, ready to put in the work to fix the station and feed the hungry.

Meanwhile, the reputation of the PCs and Hell's Gate in general has never been higher. Volunteers from across Calliope flock to Hell's Gate to join the war effort against the cult. Tick two segments each on the **Station Stability** and **Militia Readiness** clocks. If the **Cult Influence** clock has any ticks, untick one; the PCs have proven that life can be improved right now, in this world, not the next. The PCs also gain the **Liberator** perk.

Liberator
Perk

No revolution is ever civilized, nor bloodless. In its dying moments, tyranny kicks and screams and tries to drag its victims into the abyss with it. This can never be fully avoided, but it can be mitigated. You removed Steele with the greatest of care and the fewest of casualties. That, perhaps, is enough.

You gain **+1** when interacting with citizens of Impact Plaza, forever.

SIDNEY "DIAMOND" KIRK

DEAD

Sidney Kirk died as she lived: amorally, violently and for a paycheck. If her body is recovered intact, it is preserved in preparation for return to her homeworld, Meirionnydd, by request of her surviving family.

ESCAPED

If Sidney and what's left of her mercenary crew escaped, she is beyond the reach of the PCs or the Union Department of Justice and Human Rights. Realizing she's a wanted woman, she decides to pick a distant destination where she will be able to ply her trade and where her credentials will not be studied too closely: Boundary Garden. However, without access to blink gates, she will have to take the long, slow route across space. She will not be seen again for centuries.

CAPTURED

RODERICKE STEELE

DEAD

If Steele's body was recovered, it is thrown into the composting tanks, as is the custom for body disposal on large stations. No ceremony is held.

ESCAPED

If Steele manages to reach his private yacht, he has fled beyond the reach of Calliope. If it's any consolation to the PCs, Union will freeze his assets and put him on a high-priority DoJ/HR watchlist; wherever he shows up, he'll be penniless, with the entire law enforcement apparatus of a galactic superpower hunting for him.

CAPTURED

If the PCs defeated Steele but left him alive, he is immediately arrested by officers of the Union Navy, acting under orders from the Central Committee. Union then holds a consultation with various Calliopean settlements and the PCs on how to proceed.

CentComm wants to extradite Steele to Cradle to stand trial because they have concerns about Calliope's ability to assemble an impartial jury. This concern is not without merit; there are a whole lot of people whose friends or family were harmed by Steele, whether by starvation, impoverishment or direct violent action, and some of them are literally baying for blood.

However, CentComm also understands that this is a matter of great local importance: his crimes affected millions of Calliopean residents. They also understand that extradition would take a decade, and that justice delayed is justice denied. CentComm wants to arrive at a solution that satisfies all parties but still respects Steele's human rights, even if he had no respect for anyone else's.

A jury could be dispatched to Calliope, but this would also take a decade, and would potentially leave the DoJ/HR vulnerable to human rights complaints from Steele regarding the right to a fair and speedy trial. A compromise solution of assembling a jury of Union citizens and conducting the trial over the omninet is possible, and would be difficult for Steele to object to.

The easiest solution for everyone involved would be for Rodericke Steele to simply plead guilty. This is not an easy proposition, due to his fragile ego, irrationality and lack of empathy, and Union will not allow him to be coerced or intimidated into pleading guilty, either. All that being said, however, a PC might be able to find an argument that will persuade him. Anything is possible.

PANOPTES

"RESCUED" BY CLONE HARRIS

SSC's interest in Howl's revolution was purely ulterior: they only wanted PANOPTES and the treasure trove of intelligence data she's accrued. Once the clone Harris has retrieved her, he quietly departs the Plaza and returns to the *Aspect Horizon*.

Life for PANOPTES does not improve in SSC custody. She is relentlessly interrogated for information on the original Harris Bordeaux, Mind and other topics of interest. Worse, they do nothing to alleviate her cascade, since the company ontologisticians are concerned she might lose vital data if she's cycled.

Fortunately, the PCs will get a chance to rescue her during **Chapter 9: The Bleeding Edge** (p. ###).

CHAPTER 8:

BALLAD OF THE TWIN LORDS

OVERVIEW:
GOLDEN BLOOD

Go to any world in the Karrakin Trade Baronies and ask them for a joke about Begum. A popular one goes something like “Begum is unique, for the Passions decided that one was punishment enough.” A somewhat cynical Republican witticism declares “the nobles may keep it.” An Ispahsalari comedian once quipped “they call it the House of Moments because that’s how long you can stand to look at it.”

“Yes, ha ha, very droll,” the Begi reply. “We live on an ugly world – people have been telling that one since the Low Passacaglian. Get some new material.”

Of course, impish satirists immediately retort with “new material? You’ve been rerunning your House’s greatest war heroes for millennia,” at which point the whole thing usually devolves into fistfights and judicial duels.

Begum’s ruling polity, the House of Moments, has long been content to keep a low profile, both in the Baronies and the larger galaxy. They hold no major colonies in the Dawnline Shore, stick to the center of Baronic politics and make little noise in Union’s Central Committee. So what if it’s boring? Ask Khayradin how *interesting* the Sanjak Revolution was. Ask Bo if it feels *entertained* as its continents are eaten by nanites. The Baronies already fought one war out of *Interest* – how did that turn out?

Harsh and ugly as it might be, Begum is anything but boring; in fact, it’s a planet full up with secrets. High mysticism rubs shoulders with the galaxy’s most advanced medical technology. In cities carved inch-by-inch into the planet’s deep canyons, blue-lipped Augurs hunch and mutter over cards and entrails in the shadow of cutting-edge gene clinics. Death-cold wind scours the surface world, and sunlight pierces the humid fog of the canyon floor only a few hours every day, revealing strange, alien flora and fauna in its chilly swamps.

Moreover, while the Major House’s political will might value stability and predictability, its constituent minor houses all have their own individual agendas. In addition, the world pays host to the Order Xenoglossia, a major political and religious power in the Baronies that operates in complete independence from the House of Moments, often to the latter’s chagrin.

As it turns out, the center cannot hold. All of the House’s strange juxtapositions and contradictions are about to come crashing together in a highly interesting – and potentially catastrophic – reckoning.

HOUSE ANILINE

Begum’s cautious approach crystalized during the Last Argument of Kings, when Tyran of Delamar returned to Karrakis to resolve the crumbling Anno Passacaglia’s war of succession. Correctly predicting that Tyran would triumph, and that a war of reunification would soon follow, Begum submitted to Tyran before his forces even arrived in orbit of Karrakis.

Though a risk in itself, this act ultimately saved Begum the fate of worlds like Khayradin, Umara and Bo, all ravaged by the armada of Tyran’s son Tagetes. In fact, Tagetes’ ranks had been swelled by Begum’s “rapidfax” clone soldiers and sustained by its advanced medical technology. For this support, the nobles of Begum were richly rewarded, and became constituent minor houses of the House of Moments when it was established during the Dynasticlade.

Among these minor houses was House Aniline, who were awarded rulership of Begum’s vast Pallas Canyon in perpetuity. Pallas Canyon was replete with mineral wealth and exotic flora, and in the following decades, House Aniline grew fantastically rich.

As great prosperity often does, the House’s success inflated the ego of its patriarch, Basil Aniline I. Seeking to craft an enduring historical legacy, Basil declared himself the source of all the House’s success. It was he who had convinced the nobles of Begum to assent to the rule of Tyran. It was he who had been so instrumental in aiding Tagetes. It was he who had shrewdly negotiated the rulership of Pallas Canyon.

Never mind that Basil was born half a century after the Last Argument, and that his predecessor had argued to remain neutral. Never mind that House Aniline’s entry into the cloning industry had come *after* the Dynasticlade. Never mind that the House’s prosperity came through the tireless work of a million nameless laborers; it was Basil to whom glory belonged.

This egotism was not altogether unusual for Karrakin nobility, well-known for their love of glory and praise. What was unusual was how Basil Aniline suggested the House reward him: House Aniline already ruled Pallas in perpetuity; why then, should Basil not rule House Aniline in similar fashion?

With no-one possessing the power or political will to oppose him, the Copyclanarchy was instituted.

THE COPYCLANARCHY

The use of mirror-creches to maintain a dynasty is not at all unusual in Karrakin culture. It has been used since the time of Passacaglia, more than eight thousand years ago, to replace monarchs lost to calamity or age before siring an heir, or to create such an heir when no other candidate was available. What *is* unusual is their use to maintain the reign of a single man for all eternity.

For the past three thousand years, House Aniline has been ruled by the same man – or close enough. Begum's medical technology could easily extend life beyond two centuries, and whenever the current Basil's body began to fail irreversibly despite these measures, a new batch of Basils would be cloned. From amongst these new hopefuls, one would be selected – the best Basil, the one most alike in temperament and glory to his originator – to rule.

The flaws in this system presented themselves quite quickly. Replicating the original Basil's temperament meant replicating his absurd egotism; clones of Basil hated being told that they'd failed to measure up. The first couple of Basils solved this by simply having all other mirrors killed after they'd selected one to be their heir. Within a few generations, however, clones had learnt to launch political campaigns from the day they were decanted, hoping to sway their progenitor.

Meanwhile, House Aniline was quickly proving itself an embarrassment to its Major House. Basils were prone to make self-serving choices that prioritized their own glory at the expense of those around them. The one time a Basil was elected as Moments' representative to the Baronic Council, it ended in such absurd disaster that it spawned an unofficial agreement between the rest of Begum's minor houses to prevent its recurrence.

This culminated during the selection process for Basil IX, where political jockeying between aspirant clones escalated to civil war between their loyalists. The conflict became so violent that external intervention was necessary, first from the House of Moments' own military, then from the Federal Karrakin Monarchy.

In the aftermath of this debacle, the House of Moments voted nigh-unanimously (the one dissenting vote was from Basil IX himself) to "reduce" House Aniline – strike it from the rolls and revoke its noble status. Basil IX immediately petitioned the Baronic Council to reverse this decision, citing the original charter of Tyran and Calendula during the Dynasticlade.

This presented an unpleasant political quagmire for the Baronic Council. They wanted House Aniline gone almost as much as the House of Moments did, but to revoke their charter would set a horrifying precedent for other noble houses. Still, might ridding themselves of House Aniline be worth such a thing?

THE MAGUS' BARGAIN

House Aniline's salvation came from a most unlikely source: the Order Xenoglossia.

This was surprising on many levels. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) sharing a planet, the House of Moments and the Xenoglossary had never been friends. The House resented having to share a world with a parallel political power not beholden to it; the Order resented having opened its planet to settlement, only for Tyran to award it to someone other than them.

To prevent mutual antagonism from boiling over, the two polities had an unspoken agreement to stay out of each other's business. The Augurs would determine the will of the Passions and pontificate upon the meaning of the universe, the House would administrate Begum, and never the two shall meet. For the Xenoglossary to suddenly step into an entirely non-religious political dispute that centered Begum signified a sea change in the planet's politics.

The Augurs' message to the Council was simple: to reduce House Aniline was to invite disaster. They cited movements in the stars and meditative visions of elder priests, but also – unusually for the Order – direct political praxis. The reforms of Tyran and Calendula had rescued the Karrakin from an age of strife. A precedent that allowed the Council to revoke their charters would erode the legitimacy of their laws, and in time could unmake the basis of their civilization.

This gave the Council pause. Yes, House Aniline had sorely embarrassed the House of Moments, and through it greater Karrakin society. But at the time, Karrakin society was still reeling from a costly war with Union. Perhaps it wasn't a good time to uproot fundamental assumptions of Karrakin law.

The Augurs proposed an unorthodox solution: House Aniline would remain, as Tyran and Calendula had decreed. So too would Basil's Copyclanarchy, but all matters of succession would be adjudicated by a neutral third party: the Order Xenoglossia. As punishment for their transgression, and to ensure that never again would a succession crisis mar the peace of Begum, each clone would prove their worth to the Passions via ritual combat.

Basil IX immediately recognized that the Order Xenoglossia were offering him a tilted bargain: salvation in return for service. This was not a pleasing thought, but the alternative was execution, the end of his lineage and the reduction of his house. Reasoning that future generations of himself would be smart enough to undo this agreement, he consented.

Thus it was that Basil IX condemned legions of himself to die at each other's hands for centuries to come.

THE BATTLE ROYAL

The Battle Royal is brutality wrapped in elaborate layers of mythos, ritual and pageantry. Upon the declaration of a succession, Basil's mirror creches produce twelve batches of twenty-four clones. Each of these two hundred and eighty-eight aspirants are sent all over the Baronies to train in the arts of war and statecraft for a period of ten years. Upon the completion of this tutelage, they are returned to Begum and held in stasis until all aspirants have arrived.

Then they are taken to an arena deep in the wilds of Pallas Canyon, there to participate in several rounds of combat against each other. First, there are twelve qualifier rounds in which the batches fight each other until only two are left, leaving a final roster of twenty-four, two from each batch, to fight the Battle Royal. It is quite common for two members of a batch to form a temporary alliance – a Duumvirate – to increase their chances of survival.

Within the final roster, each clone is given a specific designation: a number indicating their iteration, another indicating their batch, and a letter indicating their likelihood of success as judged by the Augurs, with Alpha being the most likely to succeed and Omega the least. In an ironic twist, obtaining the Alpha designation is a death sentence; Alphas are priority targets in the battle due to their status, and no Alpha has ever survived. The previous house patriarch, prior to his coronation, was **Basil [36:11:Gamma]**.

There may only be one survivor of the final Battle Royal. A Duumvirate may form for a while, but in the end, only one of them can win. Once only a single clone remains, House Aniline once again has a patriarch.

The Battle Royal's impenetrable bureaucracy and mysticism is, in truth, a smokescreen that allows the Order Xenoglossia to groom candidates they believe will serve their goals, both on Begum and in the wider field of Karrakin society. It's a clever scam: to the casual observer, there are so many layers of random chance that the outcome of the Battle seems impossible to rig. The truth, though, is that the outcome was decided long before any randomness came into play – the Xenoglossary simply allows chance to decide between a handful of cultivated outcomes that all serve its eventual design.

For nearly a millennium and a half, House Aniline has served as a puppet for the Order Xenoglossia. There are some benefits to this for Basil, of course; he is guarded by the order's militant wing, the Stygos Grammaton, an honor not even the Prime Baron enjoys. Pallas Canyon has enjoyed untold prosperity and an uncanny knack for disaster preparation. The political influence and reputation of the House recovered and grew to new heights. All in all, the arrangement has been favorable.

Generations of Basils have chafed under it, however. This prosperity and safety comes at the price of his freedom. None of these achievements are truly his, and every element of his life is chosen for him. The warrior monks that protect him are as much jailors as guardians; he knows what will happen should he ever displease the order. He's cursed, life after life, to be an eternal, simpering mouthpiece for doddering eunuchs.

So, life after life, in what little private space and time he's permitted, he has plotted his vengeance.

THE BUILDER'S SANCTUARY

The Aniline Palace is a sprawling and ancient building, its original foundation having been laid more than three and a half thousand years ago by Basil I's ancestors. In that time, it has been expanded and renovated countless times, and then rebuilt nearly from scratch after it was devastated during the succession crisis. Given that the new palace was constructed to the exact specifications of the Xenoglossary, the Stygos Grammaton assume that they know every inch of it.

They are wrong.

The nobles of Begum had long distrusted the Order's precognitive monks, and so had devised strange countermeasures that confounded their sight. Basil IX had the few builders and architects who remained loyal to him add these touches: rooms not on any blueprint, rooms with strange angles, rooms with a prime number of walls, rooms oriented in non-cardinal directions – rooms into which his puppet masters could not see.

Only Basil knows of these places. Their secret is written nowhere and spoken to no-one, passed down only through memory engram and subjectivity override, one of the few places even the Augurs cannot intrude. Within these sanctums, Basil has conspired with himself across generations, slowly accruing the knowledge and resources to strike back at his captors.

Body after body, the gestalt of Basil's consciousness learnt skills his original self never had: patience, restraint, long-term planning. He has learnt to grit his teeth and smile, to feign humility. Most importantly, he has slowly tested the limits of the Augurs' prescience.

Basils must still die by the hundred every century or so, but now they die with purpose, and the knowledge that one day, their line shall once again be free, and every one of their corpses shall be paid back a hundredfold. The goal is not merely freedom from the yoke of the Augurs, but revenge served cold: the burning of the Xenoglossary, and an end to the line of every minor house on Begum that spurned him.

He was close to pulling it all off, until his plans were upset by his greatest enemy of all: himself.

ABOVE ALL, KNOW THYSELF

Begi cloning technology was advanced even at the time of the House of Moments' inception, and has only improved in the intervening three thousand years, as has their understanding of medical science in general. Many of the maladies that afflicted clones of yesteryear are trivial to treat, and even easier to prevent. For this reason, almost all modern clones undergo small amounts of genetic manipulation.

Basil had long realized that his most predictable element was his own genetics, but it was Basil 25 who finally managed to arrange for subtle, randomized variations to be introduced into the cloning and subjectivity override processes. This meant all following Basils were distinct from one another in small and unpredictable ways; never so much as to draw attention, but just enough to make it more difficult for Augurs to map the course of their life.

This unpredictability, however, also applied to Basil. Previously, he had been able to model his own future self's behavior with an eerie degree of accuracy simply through self-knowledge. The drift introduced by his self-randomization ate into this talent. The values of Basils in the present day were increasingly misaligned with their ancient progenitor, and they started to make decisions their past iterations didn't plan for.

At first, it was only small things: clones would come out with the wrong hand dominant, or without Basil's instinctual hatred of cats, and be forced to hide these traits. As the drift became more pronounced, however, the divergence became noticeable even to the Order Xenoglossia, but they merely chalked it up to the stress of centuries of implanted memories, and adjusted their forecasts accordingly.

All of this would still have been manageable, had two radically divergent clones not been decanted at the same time.

During the Battle Royal for the succession of Basil 37, **Basil [37:6:Theta]** quit the field and fled on a nearlight schooner that had been illegally hidden in the wilderness near the arena. Subsequent investigation discovered that he had laid plans for his escape years in advance, a fact the Augurs had not foreseen.

A technical victor, **Basil [37:2:Beta]**, emerged after defeating all remaining opposition, but the laws laid down during the Baronic Council's intervention two thousand years ago were clear: so long as there was more than one Basil, neither could be patriarch. This could not easily be changed, either; after all, the current state of affairs had been engineered specifically to avoid setting an awkward legal precedent.

THE WHOLE DAMN CIRCUS

The situation is an embarrassment for everyone. Publicly, the Order Xenoglossia was forced to admit that they didn't foresee this – humiliating, for an organization charged with divining the future. Privately, it's even worse: in the aftermath of Theta's escape, the Stygos Grammaton stumbled upon one of Basil's sanctums, and discovered the sheer scope of what he had been hiding from them.

The House of Moments, who long wished to be rid of House Aniline, have finally got what they wanted but in the worst way possible. Bereft of a patriarch, house Aniline cannot vote in the House Council, denying the plenum necessary for certain types of vote. Such votes are still being held anyway, but they're open to legal challenge if other minor houses dislike the outcome.

This situation also affects the Baronies as a whole. The Battle Royal was already a serious point of contention with the Union Department of Justice and Human Rights. Given the exceptional amount of patience Union is showing toward other human rights issues in the Baronies, especially the continuing blockade of Khayradin's breakaway colony Free Sanjak, the Baronic Council can ill afford another scandal.

The problem must be resolved quickly and quietly, lest Karrakis' enemies exploit it. To this end, Basil's opulent palace-barge, the Citadel Aniline, was commandeered by Baronic Unified Command and sent to search for the absconded heir. The Xenoglossary has also sent several Augurs, and a detachment of the fearsome Stygos Grammaton warrior-monks who guard them. Finally, to keep an eye on him, they have also dragged Basil Beta along for the ride.

It took a while to find Theta; in a further humiliation to the Order Xenoglossia, the Augurs could not initially determine where he had gone. What finally brought them to the Long Rim was, in fact, a completely different prophecy: that of a heroic soldier who was doomed to die at a certain time in Calliope. Taking into account dates, travel times and the effects of relativistic travel, the Augurs reasoned there could be no other reason for the Baronies to go to such a backwater.

It has been a long trip – several light years to the Grand Teton blink station above Karrakis, and then several more out into the Long Rim – but the Baronic fleet has arrived in Calliope at last. To its shock and horror, it has arrived in a system plunged into utter chaos, with one of the Baronies' ancient enemies squatting nearby.

Harrison Armory is here. Why? What are the Purview dogs doing? What vile devilry are they planning? Suspicions grow like poison weeds among the Baronic forces, and they reach for their swords – and on that note: why, pray tell, is SSC here as well?

PERSONS OF INTEREST

BASIL ANILINE ETERNAL HE/HIM

NOT SO MUCH A PERSON AS A LEGAL CONCEPT

"The continuance of my line is the continuance of the realm. Thus shall my domain and I flourish."

Officially, all Lords of Pallas *are* Basil Aniline. This is the elaborate legal fiction House Aniline operates under: that they have been ruled by the same man for more than three millennia.

In truth, long before Basil 25 introduced deviation into the genetic and mnemonic templates, the patriarchs of House Aniline were parodies of their originator at best. During the first few generations prior to Basil IX, the ruling patriarch had the luxury of picking his successor. Basils would claim to pick the clone that was closest to the original Basil, but they each judged this quality via their own standards. Then, once the Order Xenoglossia took over, they claimed the same, but selected for traits that would advance their long-term goals.

BASIL [37:2:BETA] HE/HIM

THE HEIR-PRESUMPTIVE

"To hell with you! I've played your murder games, yet still you deny me my promised throne!"

Basil Beta was groomed his entire life to take the throne, and suffered the brutality of having to murder his own reflections because that was what tradition demanded of him. Now that same tradition has denied him the throne he was promised, all on a technicality.

Theoretically, it was a 1-in-288 shot; pretty long odds to be sure. Another version of himself made a perfectly logical decision: leave the table, and let someone else try their luck. Beta was the one who tried his luck and beat the odds, but it was all for nothing.

Since then, Beta has been in a graceless limbo, acting as regent to his own throne. He's left to deal with the terrible trauma of Battle Royal on his own, all while he hears whispers speculating whether or not the one who fled might be a better pick for the job; *the one who fled!* Beta did *all* that was asked of him! He followed *all* the rules, while this other Basil abandoned his duty, but they're *still* not sure which of them is more "deserving!"

But he still can't bring himself to hate Theta. Despite their divergence, Beta understands Theta on a level nobody else in the universe possibly can, and in the circumstances, Beta would've done the same.

Beta might have selfish reasons for wanting to tear down the Copyclanarchy, but he wants it nonetheless. It gave him nothing but trauma, denying him the reward it had promised him on a technicality – and what benefit has it brought the Baronies? No system that inflicts this much pain for such little value deserves to exist.

BASIL [37:6:THETA] HE/HIM

THE HEIR ABSCONDED

"I will not be the echo of a dead man, and I will not be your sacrifice! Go to hell!"

While no two Basils were ever created truly equal, Basils 25's subtle poisoning of the cloning process created facsimiles that deviate from genetic and psychographic baseline far more substantially than could be accounted for by random chance. Theta is one such example. Despite having the same memories as the rest of the 37 cohort, Theta developed a radically different personality.

Theta's chosen military specialty was odd: mechanized chassis – useless in the Battle Royal, where mechs are unavailable. His academic specialties, astrophysics and set theory, were highly unusual for a Basil. He quickly formed a Duumvirate with another member of Batch 6 during the internal qualifier, later designated as Basil **[37:6:Epsilon]** during the Battle Royal.

Theta has killed three men with his own face. He fled to Calliope to avoid having to kill any more; the odds were not in his favor, and he didn't want to be king. He was fine with letting someone else take the throne; Theta just wanted peace. He set himself up as a salvage dealer in Furnace City, reasoning that nobody would ever come looking for the long-lost heir to a noble house in a backwater scrapyard. He was wrong.

Theta's reasons for wanting to end the Copyclanarchy are self-centered, but logical nonetheless: he doesn't *want* the throne! He doesn't *want* to rule – Beta wants all that, just let him *have* it! Why must Theta die to confirm what's already known – or worse, kill to earn something he doesn't even want?

HIGH AUGUR ELVORIX SHE/HER

HIGH AUGUR OF THE ORDER XENOGLOSSIA

"Speak."

The Order Xenoglossia's hierarchy is based mostly on seniority, and Elvorix is *ancient*. Novice Augurs whisper that it was she who spoke the prophecy that convinced the Baronic Council to side with the Third Committee during the revolution. That isn't true, and it's debatable whether any such prophecy was spoken, but she *was* alive at that time, more than four hundred years ago. The Blue Blood of Pangloss has extended her life even beyond the limits of Begi medical science.

Elvorix has made surprisingly few forecasts for one of her immense tenure, but she prides herself on quality over quantity – what predictions she has made have all been infallible, unfolding precisely as she had foreseen. She has never been wrong, not ever. Or at least, she *had* never been wrong, until Basil **[37:6:Theta]**.

Consulted on the subject of Theta's notable divergence from template, Elvorix considered the facts, gazed at the stars for twenty nights and confidently predicted that his divergence would be of no consequence – he would die in the Battle Royal, and any deviation from the order's design would end with his death.

Now, the council questions her competence. Her advanced age keeps getting mentioned – they all but openly speak of putting her out to pasture! *Her!*

Elvorix is an old woman driven by a terrible fear of irrelevance. She cannot accept that her visions are starting to fail – her sight is *not* dimming! If events will not align themselves to her prophecies, they must be *forced*. Passions damn it all, her visions *will* come true, if she has to do it with her own hands!

LADY HAYYAN-REYES SHE/HER

FLEETMASTER OF NAVAL GROUP 28 ANILINE

"Send for more coffee. It would be gauche of me to fall asleep in the middle of your monologue."

Lady Hayyan-Reyes of the House of Smoke, to give her full title, is a cynic – and she would be the first to tell you so. She's an old soldier, the kind who's been thoroughly disabused of any notions about glory or honor in war. If fighting must be done, then let it be done quickly and efficiently; skip the posturing, the pomp, the ceremonies, the speeches – Passions, the endless bloody *speeches!*

She resents everything about this mission. She's been sent halfway across the galaxy to solve the fallout of some absurd noble's ancient vanity project. She's forced to play babysitter not just to a prissy heir but the Augurs, who she considers to be nothing more than charlatans peddling mystic nonsense. Now, she's facing down the Armory, an enemy she wasn't expecting and isn't properly equipped to handle. She has no idea what SSC is here for, but she's seen their handiwork enough times to know it's nothing good.

More than anything, she wants this mission to be over and for conflict to be avoided. It might seem cliché, but this really is her last mission before retirement. She's racked up so much nearlight debt from her long career that her grandchildren have grandchildren; she wants nothing more than to return to Eyelet-a and live out her final years surrounded by family.

Hayyan is a practical and straightforward woman. She has no time for people who bow, scrape or suck up, and even less for people who mince their words. She will speak plainly, act decisively, and expects others to do the same if they want her respect.

LUCAS ASIDENOS HE/HIM

THE DOOMED CHAMPION

"You could sooner talk the planets out of their orbits than prevent the consummation of fate."

As a novice kuirasser in the Federal Karrakin Army, Lucas Asidenos was on exercises the day of an assassination attempt. His commanding officer, a House of Glass noble nursing a decades-old grudge against the Order Xenoglossia, ordered his regiment to open fire on a visiting Augur; amongst them, only Lucas refused. Armed only with a training mech and its light guns, he fought his entire regiment to a standstill, buying enough time for reinforcements to arrive.

In return for courage far beyond the call of duty, the order bestowed upon him a rare honor: he was summoned to the Xenoglossary and offered any boon it was within the Augurs' power to give. Being young and foolish, Lucas Asidenos asked them to look into his future and tell him of the most glorious event of his life.

It was then that Augur Elvorix spoke, proclaiming a prophecy even she did not understand: he would die in 43 years, at the age of 31, in a distant system called Calliope, slain in battle with Hell's mightiest warrior.

The knowledge of the date and time of his own death changed Lucas on a fundamental level. The inevitability of a short life weighed heavily on him, but it also made him fearless. His death was predetermined and inescapable, yes – but he could not die before that date. Until the day of his death, he would be immortal.

Now, however, his final day fast approaches – and now that he's reached Calliope and seen the PCs, he knows precisely who will end his life. He seeks only to make his final act meaningful enough to justify his sacrifice.

THE BARONIC FLEET

Despite

THE CITADEL ANILINE

REPURPOSED O’NEILL CYLINDER

The Citadel is truly colossal: a vast cylinder, thirty kilometers long and eight kilometers in diameter. It was originally a stationary space habitat, but Basil IV bought it and had it repurposed at great expense to serve as his personal palace-barge.

FKS-BC *HARLEQUIN'S JEST*

CALENDULA-CLASS BATTLECRUISER

The *Calendula*-class battlecruiser was designed from the ground up as a spectacle of Karrakin power and prestige, all practical concerns be damned. This single-minded obsession produced a vessel that is as technologically impressive as it is absurd: the only capital ship in active service capable of mounting two long-cycle lances on the same hull.

Beautiful on the outside, the ship is in fact a deeply flawed design, replete with endless technical issues. Engineers tell horror stories of temperamental power systems and shipboard fires caused by overstressed capacitors. Officers fare little better, complaining of communication outages, illogical deck layouts and labyrinthine corridors.

The *Calendula* is often pointed to by the Baronies' critics as an emblem of its flaws: posturing, impractical, profligate, bellicose, at once obsessed with pointless novelty and mired in obsolete tradition. But even those critics are forced to admit that if the *Calendula* is an emblem of Karrakin civilization, then Karrakin civilization is undeniably impressive – and dangerous.

Even by the standards of the *Calendula*-class, the *Harlequin's Jest* is notorious in the Federal Karrakin Navy. It's the name – no-one invokes the Virtue of Trickery, Deceit and Irony without paying a price. Every flag officer who's ever commanded it has never flown again: three are dead, one is living in disgraced exile in the deserts of Tilimsan, one is serving a life sentence in a military prison on Eyelet-a and the last one before Hayyan-Reyes just vanished without trace.

FKS-CV *DURENDAL*

TAGETES-CLASS AGILE CARRIER

The *Tagetes*-class agile carrier has two reputations. The first is how it wishes to be seen: a glorious symbol of Karrakin prowess and might, standing tall and proud in the ranks of the Royal Karrakin Navy, bearing the most elite pilots in the galaxy into battle.

The second is how it's actually seen: a flying daycare for spoilt rich kids who never grew up, a bonfire of money that could've funded urban renewal projects for an entire planetary arrondissement, a pretentious toy for impotent old Hagiograph warhawks.

The *Durendal* carries the bulk of Naval Group 28 Aniline's mechanized chassis compliment and all of its strike craft. Every single mech is piloted by a graduate Kavalier of the Karrakin Cavalry College, the most prestigious combat training institution in the Baronies. Every single fighter has a Navy elite at its helm. There are no finer jockeys in the system – on paper.

The truth is, however, that they're completely untested. Almost none of the flight crews have seen real combat. The Kavaliers are full up on Baronic propaganda, and think of mech combat as a glorious sport. They aren't prepared for the horror and brutality of a real war.

FKS-RE *SCOLYMUS*

CIRSIUM-CLASS RASÉE

In the Federal Karrakin Navy, frigate-scale ships are referred to as "rasées."

Placeholder.

THE SOMATOPHYLAKES

HOUSE COMPANY OF HOUSE ANILINE

Within Karrakin society, .

THE DEPUTATION

Despite the fact that the succession crisis is a purely internal issue for the House of Moments, every constituent Major House in the Baronies has sent a formal representative to Calliope. Perhaps it's because of the system's proximity to the tumultuous Dawnline Shore, or perhaps it's because it provides good cover for ulterior schemes.

1-2	**BARON MOULIN-ANISE OF THE HOUSE OF MOMENTS** (THEY/THEM) Anise is, notionally, leader of the Deputation and chief executive of the mission. In reality, their authority is constantly undermined and ignored. Other members of the Deputation act as they wish, Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes doesn't listen to a word Anise says, and High Augur Elvorix gives out orders as if she owns the place.
3-4	**FLEETMASTER HAYYAN-REYES OF THE HOUSE OF SMOKE** (SHE/HER) To her immense displeasure, Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes is pulling double-duty as the House of Smoke's formal representative in the Deputation. The House of Smoke, long-time leaders of Karrakin research into paracausal phenomena, have heard about the Chameleon Anomaly and want it studied. Given that the Armory has constructed an entire research facility around it, this won't be easy. For more details about Hayyan-Reyes, see above (p. ###).
5-6	**SENESCHAL DIONE-PARVIZ OF THE HOUSE OF ORDER** (HE/HIM) Given the diplomatic complications of sending a military force to a border system, Seneschal Parviz has been dispatched by Prime Baron Karra-Bem herself to ensure that the mission does not cause an international incident. This task, already complicated enough, has become an absolute nightmare due to the presence of Harrison Armory.
7-8	**LORD-ARCHIVIST ARCUNE-TELICA OF THE HOUSE OF REMEMBRANCE** (SHE/HER) Telica has been tasked primarily with keeping formal records of the mission's proceedings, but also with taking a census of the Karrakin diaspora within Calliope. Concealed from her House is a third, clandestine task: she has been asked by a consortium of nobles from various Major Houses to assess the system's mineral wealth for potential future exploitation.
9-10	**MARQUISE YOND-BERYL OF THE HOUSE OF GLASS** (SHE/HER) Petty, childish and spiteful, Beryl volunteered to be her House's representative solely to torment her cousin, the pirate queen Mistress Elske; the House of Glass otherwise has no agenda in Calliope. If she thinks the PCs are friends of Elske, she will be a constant thorn in their side.
11-12	**UNDERBARON PAVEL-ALTIA OF THE HOUSE OF STONE** (HE/HIM) The ultraconservative House of Stone have sent Pavel here to fix an embarrassing problem: Gabriel Sparrow, né Gabriel-Altia, who has been funding revolutionary elements in Karrakin society for years. As with most nobles in the House of Stone, his proposed solution to the problem is violence. Once that's done, he aims to root out other Ungratefuls in the system, along with their HORUS allies.
13-14	**CASTELLAN VIKTORÉ-DULESCE OF THE HOUSE OF SAND** (HE/HIM) The House of Sand have no interest in Calliope, and only bothered sending a representative to support their conservative allies in the House of Stone. Viktoré, the third son of an insignificant house, was the first to volunteer. In public, he obsequiously obeys Underbaron Pavel-Altia. In private, he is feeding information to the Ungratefuls as part of a greater plot to seize the House of Sand for his family, and is here to sabotage Pavel-Altia's efforts.
15-16	**AMBASSADOR TALIS VASCOU OF THE HOUSE OF WATER** (SHE/HER) Umara's House of Water is Republican – governed by a representative democracy, having abolished its nobility. Talis was sent by the Umaran legislature as part of an outreach project, aiming to visit Furnace City and study their unique form of government. Her mission has been utterly ruined by the Deputation's blockade.
17-18	**AMBASSADOR SOLOMON STERETT OF THE HOUSE OF DUST** (HE/HIM) The Baronies' other Republican Major House is faced with a terrible catastrophe: the slow but inevitable nanite consumption of their homeworld, Bo. Ambassador Sterett's mission is a desperate one: five billion refugees must be relocated, but the Baronies' core worlds are already crowded and the Dawnline Shore teeters on the edge of war with the Armory. Is there perhaps room for more orbital habitats in Calliope? Could fleeing Boan citizens find shelter here?
19-20	**PROVISIONAL AMBASSADOR NOGUCHI KAYO OF PETITIONER PROMISE** (THEY/THEM) The Dawnline world of San Simeon is still a colonial holding of the Federal Karrakin Monarchy, not yet raised to Major House status, but it's only a matter of time now – the House of Promise *will* rise. To this end, they're acting as a Major House already, to ease the transition once it becomes substantive. This included sending a provisional Ambassador to Calliope. Despite their lack of official standing, Kayo has a great degree of influence: given the Shore's proximity, they arrived years early, and are the only one in the Deputation who has any idea what's going on.

A NOTE ON KARRAKIN NAMES

Karrakin noble names can be somewhat confusing to outsiders. There is usually a hyphen between the given and minor house name, but there is some inconsistency in the ordering.

Some Major Houses, such as the House of Stone, put the given name first; a good example is the House of Stone's patriarch and representative on the Baronic Council, Stonelord Hyderad-Cannamos, of minor house Cannamos. Other Major Houses, such as the House of Glass, put the minor house name first; an example is Yond-Balor, first-son and kavalier of minor house Yond. Some Houses are inconsistent even between their own minor houses. Often, the choice is made strictly on what sounds better.

In general, it is most respectful to refer to a noble by their full name. In a formal context, calling a noble only by their given name is presumptuous and overly familiar; calling them only by their minor House name is terse, rude and dismissive.

Ignobles (including those from Major Houses who have abolished their aristocracy, such as Dust and Water) do not generally hyphenate their names.

LOCATION:
CITADEL ANILINE

The Citadel Aniline is a “closed-type” O’Neill cylinder, heavily modified to be capable of interstellar travel. In comparison to the “open-type” design (as exemplified by Impact Plaza), “closed-type” cylinders have no glass sections, allowing their entire inner surface area to be used for habitation. Illumination is provided by a central spindle running end-to-end at the center of the cylinder, which uses a combination of artificial light and sunlight “piped” via optic fibers from giant collector wings.

Built in orbit of Begum by the House of Moments and originally named New Cantana, it was chartered alongside several other habitats and waystations as part of a sweeping series of infrastructure and public works projects. Intended as a general-purpose space habitat for both habitation and zero-g industry, New Cantana was the flagship for the initiative.

However, after several years of failing to turn a profit, and with other parts of the project in desperate need of funding, the House of Moments accepted a generous purchase offer from Basil IV. Basil IV spent the rest of his life on the station, tinkering and remodeling it into his dream palace-barge, and many successive Basils would add their own touches.

The original structure of the cylinder was reinforced and engines were added, allowing for the ship to survive the rigors of interplanetary travel, and eventually interstellar travel as well. The previously utilitarian urban districts were rebuilt in High Passacaglian style, reflecting the grandeur of a mythologized Karrakin history. The practical green spaces and parks were transformed into grand dioramas, depicting biomes from across the Baronies, replete with their native flora and fauna.

However, despite the immense cost of its renovation and maintenance, it hasn’t seen much actual use. Save for Basil VII’s brief and disastrous tenure as Begum’s representative on the Baronic Council, the Basils rarely leave the safety and comfort of the Aniline Palace. It is an expensive bauble that hangs in the sky above Pallas Canyon, and aside from a dedicated maintenance and service crew, nobody calls it home.

This results in the Citadel’s most notable quality: a profound sense of emptiness. The cylinder has 750 square kilometers (290 square miles) of space, filled with a mixture of lovingly curated wilderness and sprawling cities. It could support twenty million people – the entire population of Calliope – yet barely twenty thousand live here, and even that number is inflated by the presence of the Deputation and their retainers.

On the right day, a visitor to the Citadel could walk through a city dozens of square kilometers in size, capable of housing a million people, and be the only person in it. Vast thoroughfares that could hold teeming throngs of citizens with citizens lie barren and silent. Even Cosimo-upon-Stars, the city which the Deputation chose as their residence, is populated only in its central government district.

The station’s service crew is vastly outnumbered by its vast crew of subalterns, whose programming compels them to stay away from humans unless their presence is absolutely necessary. This is the Karrakin noble’s dream: an invisible army of servants, out of sight and out of mind unless called for. Walk into any of the restaurants or cafes, and it’s likely that you will be the only customer, waited upon by faceless machines who bow, scrape and speak only when spoken to.

The rural areas are even more eerie. In the wilderness, where solitude might seem more fitting, the arc of the cylinder upwards and overhead dispels any illusion of a truly natural space. An array of exotic species graze, hunt and hide within carefully-crafted replicas of their natural biomes, but they are not at home here. Birds are confused by the spin gravity; insects by the polarized light of the artificial sun; sight predators by the upward-sloping horizon.

BEAT ??:
RETURN TO THE DOME

Furnace City is once again in crisis. To the citizens, it seems like they barely had any time to recover from the Steele Dome abductions before this fresh new hell was thrust upon them.

The city's population is divided over what to do. The Karrakin initially made only a single demand: hand over Basil Theta. To some citizens, exhausted from months of crisis and uncertainty, this seems like a small price to pay. But to most, this is an unacceptable violation of Furnace City's sovereignty and a human's fundamental right to liberty. Should they simply have rolled over for Steele and given *him* some of their citizens?

This is further complicated by the fact that nobody knows what identity Basil Theta has assumed, or where he's hiding. The Augurs are certain he's in the city, but they haven't explained how they know that. The Deputation demanded a genetic census of Asphodel's entire population, a proposal that outraged even the citizens who were fine with handing Basil Theta over.

Up until now, the Deputation has seemed unwilling to use military force to achieve its goals, but the city isn't sure how long this state of affairs will last. After all, why would they bring an entire military naval group if they weren't prepared to use it?

THE GENERAL VIBE

If the PCs successfully dealt with the abduction crisis during **Chapter 3** and stopped the city from getting shot with an orbital laser, their return to the city is greeted with celebration – they're heroes, after all.

If the city got shot with a laser, the response is pretty icy, even if the abductees were rescued. A massive gouge has been dug into the Burnfields, and even inside the dome, lights flicker, water rationing is in effect and there's constant, exhausting repair work going on.

Regardless of their opinions on the PCs, the cityfolk are deeply worried. Impact Dynamics was a threat that they could comprehend and understand; these newcomers are an unknown quantity, bizarre and foreign. It's also created a unique political situation.

CITY POLITICS

The last time they were here, the team witnessed a rare display of political unity not typical of Furnace City, but that time has passed. The populace is divided into three broad political groupings; arranged on a spectrum from left to right, these factions are the Paleoanarchists, the Pragnarchists and the City-Statists.

PALEOANARCHISTS

Paleoanarchists are dedicated to reviving the Municipal Assembly's original founding charter of 4708u, which declared Furnace City an independent, direct democratic non-hierarchical commune. In 4891u, this was replaced with a Second Charter by a 61% to 33% referendum vote with 6% of the population abstaining. The Second Charter established the current hybrid democracy and the position of Temporary Overseer.

Paleoanarchists reject the Second Charter as overreach and tantamount to statism, and wish to return the city to the pure anarchist principles upon which the Assembly was founded. They are perceived by most cityfolk as valuing principle over pragmatism, and support Clip Magazine's hardline approach largely on the basis of hating monarchists.

PRAGNARCHISTS

The Pragnarchists – "Pragmatic Anarchists" – are by far the largest political faction in Furnace City. This is largely due to Pragnarchism being less a single ideology and more an umbrella term for any resident of that supports the Second Charter and the Assembly's current representative quorum for day-to-day affairs. In effect, anyone who's not a Paleoanarchist or a City-Statist is a Pragnarchist by default.

Pragnarchists are considered to be the city's "centrist" faction, but for a grouping that represents a majority of the city's population, broad generalizations are difficult to make. On many occasions, Pragnarchists have voted for radical initiatives that were not supported by either of the other blocs.

The Pragnarchists are the ones most likely to make concessions to the Baronies; that doesn't mean that they're eager to do so, just that they're not absolutely opposed to it on principle.

CITY-STATISTS

City-Statists (though many of them prefer the term "Structurists") advocate for a government structure with formalized positions and centralized authority. This is more-or-less a complete abandonment of the city's founding anarchist principles, which the City-Statists consider to be impractical and poorly suited to the realities of Asphodel. They are often considered the most right-wing faction in Furnace City.

They see the current crisis as both a threat and an opportunity. The Karrakin demands are a violation of the city's sovereignty, but the situation is also an excellent demonstration of why agile government that can make decisive choices quickly is important.

THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE

It would not be unreasonable or hyperbolic to say that Paleoanarchists and City-Statists *hate* each other. Paleoanarchists see the City-Statists as nothing short of goose-stepping fascists scheming to seize autocratic power, while City-Statists consider Paleoanarchists to be blue-sky fantasists completely divorced from reality.

It's one of the major reasons why the Pragnarchist coalition has dominated city politics for more than a century. While they usually hold only a slim majority or a strong plurality, the only two factions that could unite to oppose them *would never unite*.

Now, however, the unthinkable has happened. The arrival of the Trade Baronies above Furnace City has created the impossible: a subject the City-Statists and the Paleoanarchists both agree on, albeit for wildly different reasons.

"No Negotiation, No Compromise" is a slogan both groups have adopted. The Paleoanarchists refuse, on principle, to have dealings with a monarchist state. The City-Statists, meanwhile, consider any concession to the Karrakin – especially one made at gunpoint – to be an abnegation of Furnace City's sovereignty, and moreover consider the specific demands they're making to be a violation of individual human rights.

For the first time in its history, the Pragnarchist coalition actually faces a voting bloc that might be able to beat them. They still hold a majority, but public polling shows that support is slipping. Clip Magazine struck a chord in a speech he made during a recent debate: if the Pragnarchists aren't planning to make any concessions to the Baronies, why negotiate at all?

THE QUESTION FROM HELL

As a hybrid anarcho-democracy, day-to-day affairs in Furnace City are handled by a council of elected representatives. This was a necessary compromise for practicality; as much as people want sovereignty over their own lives, most of them don't want to spend four hours every Orph in an appropriations subcommittee debating agricultural policy. Referendums are held only a few times a year, and only on vital matters that affect the city's future as a whole.

Despite the fact that it's probably the most important event in the city's history, no referendum has been held yet on exactly what to do about the Deputation's demand. There's a reason for this: it would be impossible to have one without asking a bunch of questions nobody in the city wants answers to.

Foremost among them: suppose Furnace City were to concede to the Baronies. Does anyone actually have the authority to hand Basil Theta over?

This question is uncomfortable for all three factions. To the Paleoanarchists, the answer is self-evidently "no," but they're worried that not enough people agree with them, and if it were put to a vote, they'd be in a minority.

To the City-Statists, it's even more complicated: they think someone *should* have that power, but this is difficult to square with their stance that the Karrakin should not be negotiated with.

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Flex277: tfw you think an executive power
should exist because of [current issue] but
shouldn't be used to solve [current issue]

Av0gadr0: least incoherent citystatist

                              -  Muse chatter
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The Pragnarchist position is perhaps the most awkward of all: most of them think such a power *does* exist as a logical derivation of the office of Temporary Overseer, but almost no Pragnarchist *wants* it to exist. That's a dangerous amount of power to give any entity, let alone a single individual. A lot of Pragnarchists would prefer to sweep it under the rug – the question never has to be answered if no-one asks it.

On top of that, there's the distressing fact that if a referendum were to be held on what to do with Basil Theta, it would necessarily be a city voting on whether or not to condemn a man to death. The very idea of this goes against the city's guiding political principles; hell, the city's legal experts aren't even sure whether the Second Charter would *allow* such a referendum.

On the one hand, what is commitment to principle worth when three million lives are at stake? On the other, why even bother having principles if you abandon them the moment they're tested?

At a time when the city desperately needs unity, nobody can agree on anything. Every public assembly devolves into bickering and grandstanding. The rings are filled with people soapboxing. There are protests and rallies every day. Casual conversations in bars turn violent with no warning.

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osirianScribe: This is the sixth time this
Orph the sanitation subcommittee had to
adjourn early because people won't stop
arguing about the Basil Theta thing

osirianScribe: pragnarchism is getting
nostalgic for when we had uninterrupted two
hour meetings about sewage I guess

                              -  Muse chatter
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CANAAN ZHOU

Canaan Zhou only stepped down from their role as Temporary Overseer a couple of Eurys ago. Now there's a bunch of weird monarchists with a war fleet making demands, and many of the city's residents want Canaan back. So far, they've refused – they have a strong ideological commitment to the city's anarchist principles, and feel it would set a dangerous precedent for a previous Temporary Overseer to *ever* step back into the office, let alone so soon.

But things continue to escalate, and with the city's population so split on what to do, even Canaan has to admit it would be useful to have *someone* in the chair to make quick decisions. The problem is that in Canaan's absence, the most likely choice seems to be Clip Magazine, whom Canaan is certain will make a mess of things.

"Mark my words: if someone proposes something that the Paleoanarchists and City-Statists both agree on, it's a terrible idea."

The main issue Caanan faces is that they have to answer a question the Anarchist-Statist bloc is asking: if they're willing to negotiate with the Karrakin, it implies at least the possibility of compromise. So, what exactly are they going to concede? Would Caanan be willing to trade a single human life for the safety of three million? The answer is yes, if it came to that. They'd try everything else first, but they *would* surrender Basil Theta – if the only alternative is a war the City can't win. It's a practical view, but a deeply unpopular one.

CLIP MAGAZINE

Clip Magazine advocates a hardline approach to the Karrakin: no negotiation, no concession. Furnace City won't hand anything over: not people, not genetic data, not a goddamn bead of sweat. His bold, strident stance has forged an odd alliance between two political factions normally opposed to one another.

Ironically, Clip Magazine is himself a Pragnarchist and doesn't subscribe to the ideas of either of the blocs currently supporting him, but he's become frustrated by Pragnarchist indecisiveness.

"It doesn't matter if their missing prince is in our fair city or not! These neofeudal whackjobs have no right to hover their death machines overhead and shake down our home! Even if he IS here, he's just as much a citizen as the rest of us, and they have no right to take him away! That we're even entertaining the idea is an insult to every single resident of the Terra Solus! No negotiation! No concession!"

There's one question Clip Magazine has no answer to: what exactly is he going to *do,* if not negotiate? Surely, he doesn't mean to *fight* the Baronies… right?

THE BURNING FORGE

In return for the City turning a blind eye to their piracy, the Burning Forge has always stayed out of its politics. Now, however, the situation is untenable. The Forge is currently preparing for war with the Cult (and with Impact Dynamics, if that hasn't been resolved yet), but the Baronic blockade is making it impossible to get personnel and equipment onto and off of Asphodel.

The Blacksmith wants this situation resolved one way or another. If the PCs are in the city, he'll send for them. Obviously, he will only want to talk to the PCs if they did right by him in **Act 1** – they had best stay well clear of him if they betrayed his trust.

"I want this mess sorted out. I can't operate openly in the city's political spaces, but you can. I don't care what exactly you do, but the blockade has to end. Half my organization is stuck here on Asphodel, the other half in space fighting Steele's goons and Capella's fanatics, and we can't run supplies to each other. Get it fixed!"

THE SECOND CITY

The Second City is a piece of Asphodelian folklore shared by both outlanders and cityfolk, although their accounts of it differ slightly. The basic legend states that there exists a second domed city on Asphodel, somewhere far outside the Terra Solus. That detailed satellite maps of Asphodel's entire surface have existed for centuries and no such city appears on them has not deterred the legends.

In local idiom, "the Second City" is used to refer to unrealistic or fanciful ideas – a person "living in the Second City" is lost in fantasy. During a debate in the Assembly last week, a representative mocked Clip Magazine's new budget demands by suggesting "a tariff on Second City imports."

ELECTION SEASON

As time passes and the **Calliope Clock** fills, Clip Magazine's militant rhetoric attracts more and more Pragnarchists to his side. Clip's supporters advocate that he be given the position of Temporary Overseer for the Blockade Crisis. The only credible alternative is Caanan Zhou, who has ideological objections to holding the office twice in a row.

Despite their personal convictions, Canaan can be convinced to put Furnace City's immediate safety ahead of their principles. If the **Calliope Clock** is at **Calm** (zero segments ticked), this will require a successful skill check, but if it has reached **Unrest** (one segment ticked), they'll concede immediately if they respect the PCs. If the clock reaches **Crisis** (two segments ticked), they'll come around by themselves, but by this time it will be too late – Clip Magazine has already achieved majority support with the city's population, and Canaan is no longer the favorite to win.

Depending on the city's opinion of them, the PCs might have the political clout to sway this election. A fireteam that both saved Steele's abductees and prevented his orbital laser from harming the city will have massive sway with the city's populace. Throwing their support behind a candidate more or less ensures that they will win the election.

On the other hand, a team who messed up and got the city bombarded could still use their terrible reputation to their advantage, if they're sufficiently self-aware. Any association with them would harm a candidate's public image, so a clever PC could sabotage the campaign of the candidate by delivering an endorsement.

If the PCs don't intervene at all, Clip Magazine will win during a snap election held just before the **Calliope Clock** reaches **???** (three segments ticked).

CANAAN ZHOU

If Canaan Zhou is re-elected, they immediately open diplomatic channels with the Deputation. They cleverly exploit a loophole in Calliope's complex status within Union; not recognized as a member state, but subject to its laws, Furnace City is obliged to follow the Utopian Pillars but has no DoJ/HR representative, and thus cannot legally assess Pillar compliance.

To conduct either a prisoner transfer or a genetic census without ensuring Pillar compliance would be in breach of their responsibilities to Union. If the Baronies have a problem with this, Canaan suggests they take it up with CentComm – not easy, since they're already on thin ice over the blockade of Free Sanjak.

Moreover, if the Baronies were to coerce the city into conceding, it would constitute an act of war. The City would have no choice but to appeal for external aid. Who would Furnace City turn to? Why, a polity with a common interest in opposing the Trade Baronies: Harrison Armory.

This, finally, gives the Karrakin pause. They're pretty sure Canaan is bluffing – a gaggle of anarchists, siding with megacorporate imperialists? Even so, Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes doesn't want to be remembered as the woman who started the Second Interest War. Reluctantly, she backs off.

This is, to be clear, a delaying tactic. It won't hold the Baronies back forever, but it doesn't have to; it only needs to buy enough time for the PCs to solve the issue in a more permanent manner.

CLIP MAGAZINE

If Clip Magazine is elected, it slowly but surely becomes apparent that this was a mistake. Clip never actually expected to win; his exercise in brinkmanship has spiraled out of control. Everyone is looking to him for guidance now, but he's not a leader, he's a quartermaster; he hands out guns and mechs, for Christ's sake! He should step down, shouldn't he? No, no, he can't step down. That would make the City look weak, make *him* look weak.

Words just start pouring out of his mouth. He hopes they'll sound absurd, make him look like a blowhard, but for Christ's sake, *people just keep listening to him!* Do they not *hear* what he's saying? Double the militia budget – *with what money?* Expel the Karrakin ambassadors? *They did it,* and now there's no diplomatic channel to the Deputation! Start working on "anti-orbital deterrence" – *what does that even mean?!*

He was just tired of Pragnarchist inaction! Why didn't Zhou start campaigning sooner?! He just wanted to give them the kick up the ass they needed to get over their ideological hangups! But he's too proud to admit any of it, and so the awful machine he's created starts to grind into motion.

RATIO SALVAGER

Amid all of this political turmoil, **Basil [37:6:Theta]** – or as he's currently known, **Ratio Salvager** – is quietly taking stock of his options. Furnace City seems pretty set on defending him, but that could easily end in disaster; for all their bold words, the city has little hope of mounting a defense if the Deputation decides to use force, and three million lives would be at risk. He can't have that on his conscience.

Theta currently just wants to run again; somewhere far away, somewhere the Karrakin truly can't get to him. Where exactly that is, he's not sure, but all he knows is that right now, he needs to take the heat off of Furnace City. The problem is that the Deputation has set up an orbital blockade and he can't leave by normal means. Besides, if he were to bolt out of the system, they could just analyze his trajectory and follow him.

Placeholder

"I don't care what the warhawks say, this city can't win a conventional war with the Deputation, and they shouldn't try, especially not for one man. But we don't have to fight fair, and we can trap them with their own customs. Let me explain.

"The Great Game is an ancient Karrakin rite that was invented to resolve irreconcilable disagreements between noble houses without risking massive loss of life and damage to infrastructure. It's a sort of… expanded duel? A mock war, perhaps. Each side negotiates on the location of the battlefield, the strength of deployed forces, the victory conditions, and so forth.

"Convince the City to issue a challenge. Maybe in some other time, some other place, they Deputation would refuse. But here? Now? Close to the Dawnline Shore, with the Armory watching? The humiliation of being less faithful to their own traditions than a gaggle of hinterland outsiders would be unthinkable!

"Now, winning the Great Game won't be EASY, but it will be POSSIBLE, in contrast to trying to take them in a conventional war. And the City will have you on its side, will it not? You seem to be the great equalizer as of late."

HISTORY

"Oh, the Great Game's history is quite fascinating! It was invented during the Low Passacaglian Period, when the authority of the Anno was becoming increasingly feeble. It was a sort of… pressure release valve, you know, to stop internecine conflicts from threatening the stability of an already overtaxed empire. As a relic of that time, it would normally have been erased by Tyrannus when he seized power, but it turns out his son Tagetes was a huge fan, so it stayed on the books."

RATIO'S INVOLVEMENT

"I'm sure if this Basil Theta character is here in Furnace City, he values his privacy and anonymity just as much as I do."

RATTING HIM OUT

If the PCs find out who Ratio Salvager really is, there exists an obvious option: tell the Karrakin about it. Within hours, they have landed enough troops outside the city that escape is impossible, and to save the people of the city a ruinous invasion, Theta gives himself up, likely going to his death.

From a practical perspective, this is the correct option. Weighed in the balance, one life is nothing against the three million people in Furnace City, and the twenty million souls in Calliope. The PCs need to lift the blockade, and they need to secure the assistance of the Karrakin fleet to fight the cult.

But the world is not saved by cold, pragmatic calculation. *Lancer* is a story about impractical heroes who believe a better world is possible and spit in the eye of tyrants. The PCs *can* do this, but there will be dire consequences – don't tell them any specifics beforehand, but make sure they know it will be *bad*.

The entirety of Calliope is outraged, but Asphodel in particular feels that they've been betrayed. Even those who were in favor of handing Theta over are enraged, because it should have been *their* choice – it wasn't the PCs' place to intervene. Everyone is appalled that the SRT would betray someone's trust so fundamentally.

The team's reputation is the least of their concerns, though. Their betrayal manages to screw over basically everyone associated with them.

First of all, Ratio Salvager's business no longer exists. If the PCs made a deal with him in (*In Golden Flame Act 1,* p. 197) that deal is void, and you untick a segment of **Station Stability**.

The outlanders and Furnace City no longer trust the PCs, and they no longer trust Hell's Gate in general – the region is beginning to boycott the station. Untick a segment of **Station Stability**.

Across the system, people have lost faith in the PCs. It's not supposed to matter where you come from when you're in Calliope – but apparently the SRT didn't get that memo. Untick a segment of **Station Stability**.

On Hell's Gate, the entire militia is suffering from association with the SRT's betrayal. Respect for the

PCs amongst their fellow fighters is at an all-time low. Untick a segment of **Militia Readiness**.

In total, the PCs lose 1 **Militia Readiness** and 2 **Station Stability**, or 3 if they made a business deal with Ratio in Act 1. They also find themselves permanently unwelcome on Asphodel.

Snitch
Burden

He trusted you, and you sold him out to those monarchist scum like he was coin to be spent. Your word is worth as much as spit in the mud: less than nothing. Leave until the rain stops, you rat fuck – we don't want your kind here.

For the rest of the campaign, when interacting with residents of Asphodel – cityfolk or outlander – you suffer **+2**⛀ and the final roll can never be affected by **ACCURACY**.

Lucas Asidenos is absolutely disgusted with the team and decides that they are, in fact, not hell's greatest warriors. In search of a worthy death, he challenges Zinfandel DeJean to a duel instead.

With Basil Theta safely captured, the final duel of the Battle Royal goes ahead as planned – see p. ### for details on how to resolve this.

Move immediately to **Downtime**. Make sure the PCs know that the **License Level** they receive is paid for entirely by the Baronies. Whatever else you can say about the them, the Karrakin know the value of informants, and pay their thirty pieces of silver swiftly.

MISSION:
ONCE AND FUTURE KING

The nurse pointed out that identical twins were already clones in a sense, and Mother Emmanuel suggested that the soul to worry about belonged to the person who would have himself cloned at great expense when so many unwanted children were going hungry.

– Mark Salzman, Lying Awake

BRIEFING

The Karrakin Trade Baronies seeks a missing clone to compete in a ritual combat with a mirror of himself. One of them must die so that the other may rule a fiefdom, and neither of them are particularly eager to give up their life.

GOAL:	Resolve the Aniline succession crisis. Convince the Karrakin to lend their aid. End the threat to Furnace City.
INTEL:	Karrakin nobles typically employ the best chassis money can buy, and will not be easy targets. However, they are rigid in their thinking, consider close combat to be more glorious, and often leave long-range weaponry and technical support roles to their ignoble retainers, who are less well-equipped.
STAKES:	The safety of Furnace City – and more importantly, its assistance – can't be ensured while the blockade endures.
REWARD:	Furnace City will devote its resources to Calliope United. Depending on the outcome, the Karrakin Trade Baronies may do the same.
PROBLEMS:	Neither clone wants to die; what Karrakin nobility wants and what is good for the world are often out of alignment; the Order Xenoglossia's goals are unclear, but almost certainly in opposition to yours.

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Placeholder

BEAT ??:
PITILESS TERRAIN

It would be redundant to describe any planet in Calliope as “unpleasant;” the Long Rim is *defined* by its lack of pleasant planets. That said, each planet in Calliope is *uniquely* unpleasant; none of them are awful in precisely the same way. Mróz, in particular, stands out for the sheer *variety* of ways in which it can kill you.

Mróz is shaped by the proximity of its moon, Strata, which sits barely 30,000 kilometers above the surface of the planet; so close that it completes an orbit in less than thirty hours. This exerts unbelievable tidal stress on the planet, driving intense volcanism and giving the planet a thick, toxic atmosphere composed primarily of nitrogen, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide.

Because of the planet’s low gravity and high tectonic activity, its volcanoes can grow to titanic proportions. The shield volcano of Xibalba Mons towers more than 17 km above the local plain, while the Salamis Mons stratovolcano rises 15 km out of Medrano Lacus, a crater lake at the planet’s north pole.

The planet’s distance from Calliope’s star makes it too cold for liquid water, but the pressure and temperature are perfect for a more exotic hydrology: liquid hydrocarbons. Rivers of frigid ethane, propane and acetylene crisscross the surface, carving deep canyons and emptying into massive inland lakes.

This combination of freezing temperatures and high volcanic activity causes severe temperature gradients across the planet’s surface, resulting in harsh weather: acetylene rain, lightning storms, gale-force winds and massive hurricanes are everyday occurrences.

Despite being a thoroughly unsuitable candidate for terraforming even by the standards of Calliope, a group of first-wave colonists tried to do it anyway. Their first order of business was to raise the planet’s surface temperature, and the way in which they sought to accomplish this was the Bores: drilling a bunch of giant holes down to the planet’s mantle.

This project succeeded only in the most literal sense: the Bores did breach the Mohorovičić discontinuity and cause massive updrafts of superheated high-pressure air. However, all this accomplished was the creation of several small regions of boiling heat racked by constant earthquakes and uncontrollably violent storms.

Even in such a ferocious environment, there’s a small population of outlanders who make a living prospecting and mining. Settlement tends to hug the equator, where the weather is “warm” enough to prevent glaciation.

And anywhere that there’s people in Calliope, there are also pirates.

THE FROSTBURNERS

As pirates go, the Frostburners are both very young and very old. For the entire Void Age, Mróz has been plagued by a succession of pirate clans who go by that name, but how much continuity there is between them is dubious. More than once, the entire clan has been wiped out to the last man by bounty hunters, vengeful Mrózian vigilantes or other pirates. In time, however, a new group of pirates adopts the same fire-and-ice imagery, and the cycle repeats.

The current iteration is a decade old, rebuilt almost from scratch after Andros Capella and the Hell Hounds slaughtered their predecessors at the infamously brutal Battle of Xibalba Mons. Of their original ninety-strong number, just three survived, and only because they were absent that day, stuck in an Icebreaker lockup.

The three Revenants, Flame, Frost and Flood, as they call themselves, recruited and trained a new generation of Frostburners to carry the frozen torch. The group's long-term goal was to avenge the fallen of Xibalba Mons by killing Andros Capella and destroying the Hell Hounds. They were understandably upset when the PCs stole their thunder and did all of this without them, and their outrage only deepened when Andros Capella rose from the dead as a revenant himself.

The Frostburners hold the PCs personally responsible for not only stealing their vengeance, but for the entire chain of catastrophe that allowed Andros to become an unkillable immortal. The PCs lured Andros to the *Tachyon*. The PCs killed TRIPLE-POINT, which posed itself as the paracausal counterbalance to the Cult. The PCs failed to prevent Andros' resurrection. As far as the Frostburners are concerned, this is all their fault.

ARRIVAL

From orbit, Mróz is a thing of harsh beauty. Its single moon, Strata, looms large over the planet's horizon as you descend through its turbulent clouds. Frigid rain batters the Tooth*'s outer skin, an alien downpour of ethane and acetylene.*

As you pass into the lower atmosphere, the vast, desolate expanse of the Vyraj Plateau stretches out before you. Ash and smoke pours from volcanoes in great, night-black plumes, whipped almost horizontal by the driving wind. The world is cast in shadowless grey, lit every few seconds by pillars of lightning.

"Harvest Gold Zero-Four-Five-One from Tziernobog Spaceport, we see you on radar. Vector for landing on pad twelve. Expedite your approach – ice storm incoming, over."

TZIERNOBOG

Built in the most tectonically stable region of the equatorial Vyraj Plateau, Tziernobog is the largest settlement on Mróz, numbering around ten thousand permanent residents – close to a tenth of the planet's population. It hosts the planet's only major spaceport, serving as a hub for both local and off-world trade, and as a staging area for the various prospecting and mining operations that make up the planet's industry.

The settlement is a frontier town in most respects, clustered around one end of the spaceport. Buildings are partially buried in the Mrózian soil to preserve heat and protect from the weather, but deposition of ash from nearby volcanoes requires periodic resurfacing to prevent the town from being buried. Almost every building is connected, meaning a resident can live their entire life without ever going outside – a necessity, given the hostile environment.

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Ic0n0cl4sm: man has touched less grass than
the average tzierno resident

                                -  Muse chatter
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Luxuries are in short supply in Tziernobog; nobody should expect to find a five-star hotel. Still, it has more amenities than anywhere else on the planet, mostly due to the amount of off-world trade that passes through its port. Its population often swells during particularly harsh winters in either hemisphere, as outlanders retreat to the safety of its stable, relatively mild equatorial climate.

Mróz has an extremely slow 97-hour rotation – just over four standard days. As this is unsuitable for human sleep schedules, Mrózian days tend to be delineated into "quarters" – dawn, day, dusk and night, which are 24, 24, 24 and 25 hours long respectively.

SHOO! SHOO!

Tziernobog might be the busiest town on the planet, but that doesn't mean it's busy; quite the opposite. Far from the hustle and bustle of the Big Six, the settlement is usually insulated from the political dealings of the wider system – an arrangement it's perfectly happy with. Let the Icebreaker bicker about tourism, let the Lament set fuel prices; so long as they keep buying molybdenum and ethane, who gives a damn?

This ambivalence makes Tziernobog an unwelcoming place for politicians and activists (Howl tried to recruit for her coalition here, and they told her to get lost), but the insularity means that whenever something big happens on Mróz, everyone in the town will talk about it – likely because they disapprove of it.

Arrudye Morgan, the mayor of Tziernobog, has been watching the deteriorating political situation in the system with great concern. She knows *exactly* who the PCs are, and – justifiably or not – considers them to be agents of chaos who bring death and disorder. She can't *make* them leave, as Hell's Gate is one of her biggest customers, but she wants them out of town as fast as possible. Thus, she'll do just about anything to help them, so long as it means they'll go away.

To this end, residents are almost *suspiciously* helpful. They know the location of a suspected Cult base – they can mark it on your map! You want to see orbital traffic records for the last month? Sure! Do you need gear for the trip? 75% discount for the heroes of Fort Cerberus! Do you need a storm-hardened supply crawler for the journey? Just take one of ours! No need to bring it back, even – it's yours, my friend! Don't worry about it!

If the PCs dig into this unusual enthusiasm for assisting complete strangers (and the underlying enthusiasm for those complete strangers to leave), residents will at first try to dismiss their concerns. They're just being helpful – isn't that what the PCs want? Most will fold under continued pressure, however, and admit that Arrudye told them to do whatever it takes to make the PCs leave, up to and including just bribing them with gifts and equipment.

If confronted about this, Arrudye will just come out and say it: she thinks the PCs are dangerous lunatics who bring calamity everywhere they go. It just so happens that in this case, her goals align perfectly with theirs – if the PCs get what they want, they'll leave, and all the giant robot fights, explosions and orbital strikes will happen *somewhere else*.

Any skill checks the PCs make in Tziernobog receive **+1** so long as it would hasten their departure. If it looks like something that would make them stay longer, the check instead receives **+1**.

BEAT ??:
BIDDING WAR

"We, the Municipal Assembly of Furnace City, do declare our city's grievance: you, the Deputation of the Karrakin Trade Baronies, hold hostage our sky from us with your machines of war. With threat of sword, cannon and kuirass, you seek to steal one of our citizens from us, and to justify your trespass, you beat your chest and gesture to Baronic law, though you know full well we bow to no Baron.

"You think we will bend the knee because you outnumber us. You think we will surrender because your warships blot the sun from our sky. You think fear for the burning of our homes and the slaying of our families will cow us. You are wrong. We shall have vindication for these injustices. To you above, we, the Municipal Assembly, do declare a challenge: let us play the Great Game."

Furnace City has no chance of defeating the Karrakin Deputation in a conventional war; the Navy has orbital supremacy, and their military forces outnumber the City twenty to one in mechs and two hundred to one in soldiers. Millions of lives would be at risk, both within the dome and in outlander settlements throughout the Terra Solus.

By invoking the Great Game, the City have trapped the Karrakin with their own customs and laws. The Great Game is an ancient rite dating back millennia. It's certainly unorthodox to be challenged by a bunch of scruffy outworld ignobles, but to refuse would be a humiliation; a mark of cowardice and an indication to the rest of the galaxy that Karrakis doesn't value its own traditions. As much as they know they're throwing away their own advantage, the Karrakin have little choice but to accept.

VENUE

The Karrakin have chosen an off-world venue for the Game. While the intent was to remove the City's home-field advantage, this plays directly into the Assembly's desire to spare the Terra Solus the violence that even a limited conflict would bring.

The moons of Asphodel are too politically sensitive due to the recent conflict between Impact Dynamics and Howl's rebellion. Amphion would've been ideal, but SSC won't let anyone near it. The moons of Stygia, Zahhak and Kalevala are too distant from the Citadel Aniline. That leaves only one realistic choice: Mróz.

FORMAT

At absurd expense, the Deputation has deployed a vast fleet of construction mechs to the Irkalla Expanse on Mróz, who have dutifully flash-printed two entire fake cities, complete with outlying settlements, outposts and points of strategic interest between them. They are based on Cosimo and Laurent, city-states from ancient history that predate unified Karrakin society.

Furnace City has been assigned the role of Cosimo, while the Deputation takes the role of Laurent. This is a subtle jab at the City and at Basil Theta; much later in history, Cosimo was the hiding place of one of the many competing Annorate heirs during the Last Argument of Kings, and was bombed flat because of it. Laurent, meanwhile, managed to avoid destruction.

Each side has the same goal: seize and occupy the Baronic palace of the opposing force. "Occupy" implies an unspoken secondary objective that the Karrakin have rigged in their favor. It's not enough merely to enter the enemy palace: if the besieged side still has active military forces remaining, they may attempt to unseat the occupiers and reclaim their palace. This functionally requires Furnace City to deplete the Deputation's entire deployed force before they can win.

TERMS

Each side may make any sort of demands in regards to the prize they'll receive if they win; both sides must agree before the contest takes place.

Furnace City's demands are simple: withdrawal of the Deputation's blockade, full financial compensation for any lost business and economic uncertainty it caused, and finally, permanent amnesty and anonymity for Basil Theta (assuming he's in Furnace City at all, which is not a thing they're obliged to confirm at this time). The Order Xenoglossia condemned the latter concession – but since they have no official voice in the Deputation, their objections were dismissed.

The Karrakin demands are similarly understated: they merely ask for full and unlimited co-operation in their search for Basil Theta, and an apology for the inconvenience the City's stubbornness has caused. Underbaron Pavel-Altia of the House of Stone was agitating for a clause requiring the City to pay the expedition's travel expenses, but this was swiftly dismissed by the rest of the Deputation.

FORCES

By ancient law, neither side can field a force more than four times the size of the other; this is ideal for Furnace City, and crippling for the Deputation – it cuts the massive numerical advantage the Karrakin have over the City to a much more manageable size.

That said, the Karrakin forces are still far superior on paper. They field the best chassis the Royal Karrakin Foundries can produce. They've been trained by the finest military institutions in the Concern. They have thousands of years of military tradition and the weight of an empire behind them. Furnace City has a volunteer militia armed with whatever frames the discretionary budget could afford.

Furnace City wants to risk the smallest amount of personnel and materiel possible, but they also want to *win*. This means bringing their best, and unfortunately, that means *risking* their best. Nobody can be sure they're coming home from this – even with some holds barred, mech combat is a deadly occupation. To this end, the City is soliciting outside assistance. As usual, what this actually means is they want to hire the PCs.

BEAT ??:
THE ROMANCE OF LUXURY

Regardless of what happened in Act 1, the Icebreaker Borealis is struggling. Even if widespread damage to the station was prevented, crisis after crisis is striking the rest of the system, and it's frightening all the tourists away. The Cult's largest stronghold sits within visual range of the station. Cosmopolitan cruise ships drop out of bolt, take one look at the state of Calliope, go directly to Endymion's Lament, fuel up and leave again.

Whether or not Evelina Bondarchuk was forced to flee the station, the Gift-Bronze Casino is in deep financial trouble. Her plot to seize power through chaos and instability backfired on her, either by being revealed to the world or by crippling the source of her wealth. If she fled justice, the Board has probably seized it and is squabbling over who gets to take possession of it.

Meanwhile, the system's poor and needy are bent double under the weight of Rodericke Steele's manufactured hunger crisis – a man without honor, dignity or a sense of duty, profiting off the misery of the system's most desperate and deprived.

Enter the Deputation.

The Karrakin deputation is looking for allies both in the short and long term. In the here and now, it seeks aid locating its missing clone. Over a greater timespan, there's a sense among the Karrakin that Calliope may become relevant to galactic politics again. Tensions are growing in the Dawnline Shore, as Harrison Armory seeks to steal Karrakin worlds out from under them.

Its approach is two pronged: an appeal to the powerful, and charity for the powerless.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Only a day after the City issues its challenge, a priority announcement goes out over public omninet channels, and is repeated via the Muse.

"Hark and attend now the Herald of the House of Moments, who brings tidings to all within Calliope.

"The House of Moments is delighted to announce a day of celebration, soon to be upon Calliope. All are welcome to join the festivities – the Baronies promise that those left hungry by the perfidy and selfishness of Impact Dynamics shall indeed be fed. We attach to this message the forms necessary for requesting food aid. The prosperity of the Trade Baronies is nothing if it cannot be shared.

"In addition, Baron Moulin-Anise of the House of Moments calls out to the preeminent Kavaliers of Hell's Gate, so recently victorious in their exploits elsewhere in the system, and says thus: there shall be a banquet upon the Icebreaker Borealis, in your honor. Honor us in return with your presence."

Concurrent with the announcement, a Karrakin ship arrives on Hell's Gate carrying a messenger who delivers formal, personalized invitations to each PC. He is accompanied by a small detachment of tailors, stylists, swordsmiths and protocol instructors.

THROW THEM A BONE

The Citadel Aniline used to be a space habitat; it was built with the agricultural facilities to feed millions of people. While its capacity has diminished somewhat due to age and the repurposing of the ship as a mobile pleasure palace, its food production still outpaces any settlement in the system other than Impact Plaza.

While it is the commoner's duty to defer to a noble, it is in turn the noble's duty to protect the commoner and ensure their prosperity. Thusly, it is a Baron's duty to aid the starving and sick. As part of the festivities, the Delegation begins distributing food and medicine to the Thousand Habs. The residents of Calliope grumble about how condescending the whole thing feels, but accept the food anyway – they can go back to being principled after a good meal.

GUESTS OF HONOR

ACCEPTING THE INVITATION

Should the team accept the invitation, the artisans accompanying the messenger immediately get to work making the PCs presentable for the occasion. The tailors and stylists are talented, patient and more respectful than one might assume; they will happily adapt to the formal styles of any culture.

At formal Karrakin events like this one, it is expected that guests will arrive bearing a sword – much courtly protocol in the Baronies revolves around the proper handling of swords. Thusly, if a PC doesn't have a sword, the swordsmiths will make them one. Again, these are master swordsmiths who can forge blades in various different cultural traditions.

The protocol instructors are less flexible; they curtly instruct the PCs in the various forms they must respect at all times. They also warn the PCs that as guests of honor, they'll be expected to assemble an Honor Guard, whom the instructors will also drill relentlessly.

SNUBBING THE BARONIES

It's entirely possible for the team to refuse the invitation. They can do so rudely or politely, but it makes little difference; the refusal itself is an insult. For the guests of honor to refuse to show up to a banquet held in their name is a terrible loss of face for the Baronies, and guarantees a cold reception in the future.

NO-SHOWING

Just about the worst thing the PCs can do, however, is agree to attend the banquet, avail themselves of the Deputation's gifts, then skip the event. At least openly refusing the invitation would've shown the slightest iota of respect; skiving off like this is humiliating to the Karrakin, and they will not soon forget such a slight. All interactions with Karrakin individuals receive **+1**⊖ for the rest of the mission.

THE ENTOURAGE

Each PC is entitled – and, indeed, *expected* – to bring an entourage. First and foremost, this includes an Honor Guard, a person or small group of people who will act to protect the team both physically and in reputation. They must be martially competent, conversant in Karrakin courtly tradition and – most importantly – patient. They must do many monotonous things like announcing a PC's full list of titles when they enter a room, holding their sword while they eat, and challenging anyone who impugns their honor to a duel.

Furthermore, it is assumed that each PC will bring a troupe of lovers, spouses, close friends and family members, colleagues, assistants, hangers-on, yes-men, sycophants, etcetera. The larger the clique, the more prestigious, but the larger the responsibility, too.

The PCs can use this to get people into the event that would never be invited otherwise, and the Deputation aren't allowed to question or object – after all, they're the guests of honor. Depending on who the PCs choose, this may ruffle some feathers anyway; the Deputation aren't going to be happy if they're forced to pay host to a known Ungrateful, for instance.

Some NPCs will jump at the chance to attend such a prestigious gathering; others might want nothing to do with it. Some might already be invited – see the various sections below – and may or may not find it convenient to tag along with the team.

FEAR THE ROSE'S SCORN

Notably missing from the banquet's exhaustive guest list are Mistress Elske and the Knights of the Dark Core. It isn't just that they weren't invited: they were *actively uninvited.* The Baronies see the Knights as nothing more than "common gutter-trash engaged in a perverse parody of chivalry," and went so far as to make a public announcement to this effect.

This is not the whole truth – this petty move hides even greater pettiness. The Baronies know exactly who Mistress Elske is: **Principe Yond-Paradis of the House of Glass**. In truth, her piracy is of little consequence; it's simply an excuse for a rival family member, Yond-Beryl, to humiliate her.

```
Simulacrima58: Wait no I'm sorry, why are we
acting like Elske being House of Glass is
some kind of shocking revelation?

Simulacrima58: In least surprising twist
ever, deeply extravagant Karrakin lady
leading a knight LARP turns out to be from
the House of Flamboyant Chivalry Fetishists

                              -  Muse chatter
```

Mistress Elske is *furious*. Her anger, however, is of the cold and calculating sort; she plans to exact her retribution delicately, without resorting to violence or boorishness. She has two plans for this: one involves the PCs, and one does not. Both exploit loopholes in Karrakin codes of decorum.

If she's on good terms with the PCs, she makes a simple request: allow her and the Knights to act as their honor guard. As the banquet's guests of honor, the deputation would be forced to accept; to do otherwise would be to question the honor of people they have specifically declared to be worthy of high honor.

HONOR GUARD

If the PCs accept, the Deputation has no choice. Smiling through gritted teeth, they must not only welcome the Knights of the Dark Core, but issue a formal apology for "slanders against their integrity, unbefitting of the dignity of Karrakis." Best of all, the Deputation foists the responsibility for making this apology upon Yond-Beryl, who must now experience the soul-crushing humiliation of having to grovel before her hated cousin. Yond-Beryl will not soon forget this, nor will she forgive.

Though she carries an air of impenetrable smugness throughout the event, Mistress Elske is in all other respects a perfect Guard of Honor for the PCs. She is quick to instruct them in necessary protocol, ensures that no slight to their dignity goes unpunished, and, if asked, can provide detailed information on just about everyone attending the party.

PARTY CRASHERS

If the PCs refuse, or if she's otherwise not on good terms with them, Mistress Elske and the Knights plan to gatecrash the party anyway and present a number of gifts which are actually clever insults.

WELCOME TO THE PARTY

The banquet is scheduled such that the PCs will have plenty of time to reach the Icebreaker Borealis at a comfortable acceleration. If they intend to take a bolt anyway, they're instructed to leave enough time to fully recover before attending – it would be impolite to show up bleeding from the eyes.

The Deputation has leased out the entirety of the Gift-Bronze Casino and Resort for the event. If the PCs visited it previously, it looks the same on the outside, but inside it's almost unrecognizable; the tasteful, reserved neo-deco trappings have been subsumed by gaudy Karrakin splendor.

Exactly how deep this change goes depends on the position of Evelina Bondarchuk. If she's still on the station, she's made sure the Karrakin don't make any permanent changes; they're allowed to hang tapestries and replace freestanding furniture, but they're not touch anything nailed down.

However, if she's fled the station, the Karrakin have nobody to hold them back. It feels increasingly likely that they'll own the place for good, and while they didn't have time for any major redecorating projects before the banquet, they've already started ripping out and replacing the fixtures.

XENIA, GUEST-RIGHT

If the PCs didn't take Elske up on her offer to be their honor-guard, she will gatecrash the banquet.

There is a sudden commotion from the entryway. A long line of heavily armored figures marches purposefully into the hall, and at their head is none other than Elske, Grandmistress Martial of the Knights of the Dark Core.

Baron Moulin-Anise shrieks an admonition, their face purple with rage. "You! Hedge-knight! Besmircher! Pretender! You and your ilk were TOLD you weren't welcome here! How DARE you intrude!"

Swords are drawn by the Karrakin guard, and the Knights reach for their weapons in turn, but Elske raises a hand sharply, a serene smile on her face.

"I am Principe Yond-Paradis of the House of Glass, fifth-daughter to Yond-Magnus. This eve I come to honor the Great Game, and I claim Xenia, guest-right, in the name of the Builder, the Broker, the Titan and the Pathfinder."

A tall young woman with a striking resemblance to Elske stands from her chair, howling an objection. "You have no right to utter my house's name, cretin! The house of Yond rejects you, casts you–"

Elske dismisses the challenge with a wave of her hand. "Calm yourself, dearest Beryl, cousin mine; we Yond must set an example for all of Glass, no? Though I am long prodigal, my name has never been reduced – do you speak with Yond-Balor's voice? Does blessed first-son grace us with his presence?" There is a pronounced pause. "Or do you invoke his authority in absence of his permit?"

Seething, teeth gritted, trembling with rage, eyelid twitching, Yond-Beryl falls silent and sits down.

"Now, I've brought some gifts to honor the occasion," Elske declares, her voice thick with malicious glee.

- For Pavel-Altia and the House of Stone: a butcher's cleaver forged of "finest Calliopean gold." Calliopeans do not value gold, it is not a good material to make blades from, and the choice of implement casts obvious aspersions upon the House's conduct in war.

- For Seneschal Parviz-Dione, a bottle of raspberry wine from a failed Calliopean settlement. It is allegedly sublime in flavor, but Karrakin custom holds that it would be disrespectful to drink it due to the tragedy of its creation. A luxurious beverage that must never be drunk; useless enough already, but it is doubly inappropriate, as Parviz is teetotal.

- For Baron Moulin-Anise of the House of Moments, the sword of a Harrison Armory captain, "to replace that dull old thing at your waist." There are *many* insulting implications here, but perhaps the worst is that Moulin-Anise could never claim such plunder by their own hand.

- For her cousin Yond-Beryl of the House of Glass: marigold yellow bedsheets made of finest quality spider silk. This is a salacious and inappropriate gift as it stands, but the use of spider silk also carries implications of deceit and malevolence.

- For High Augur Elvorix, a "wondrous relic from ages long past, attested in Old Earth history, to assist with your divinations." It's a Magic 8-Ball.

- At the feet of Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes, Elske lays the sword on her hip. Among all the members of the Deputation, the Fleetmaster is the only one Elske actually respects. Yet this is still an insult, though not to Lady Reyes: custom would have her surrender her blade to Basil Aniline. By laying it at the feet of another, Elske is not-so-subtly indicating who she considers to have the real power here.

Predictably, these "gifts" provoke disdain and outrage, but because they were given under guest-right, their recipients may not refuse them, nor complain.

HARRISON ARMORY

Though they are long-time enemies, the Deputation are obligated by protocol to extend a formal invitation to representatives of the Armory. If the PCs have not completed **Chapter 6: Crisis Above Chameleon** (p. ###), the Armory sends only Thor Valentinian. This is an indication that they do not consider pleasantries with the Baronies to be a priority. Switch tags along as part of Thor's "entourage," but only because they know the PCs will be there and they want to nag them.

If **Chapter 6** has been completed, the Armory sends a full delegation, led by either Lord Director Fry or Dr. Odin Valentinian, depending on who's in charge. The Valentinian children may show up as well, if they've been properly reconciled.

If Dr. Valentinian is leading the delegation, the PCs are afforded a rare chance to see Odin out of his element. He's never been one for social gatherings, especially ones where he needs to represent the whole Armory, and he would quite clearly prefer to be anywhere else.

If Lord Director Fry is leading the delegation, he and Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes finally meet in person, after having faced one another on the battlefield many times:

A tense silence falls as Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes and Lord Director Fry stand an arm's length apart. Two admirals from bitterly opposed nations stare one another in the eye. Both sets of bodyguards have their hands on their weapons.

Then the Lord Director cracks a smile. "Hayyan, you wretched old goat! I haven't seen you since Chemosh – and you're still serving? I thought they would've put you in a home decades ago."

The Fleetmaster snorts loudly, grinning like a shark. "Pah! Chance would be a fine thing, Fry – I'm just as surprised to see the Steward Council haven't taken you out behind the woodshed yet. Now, did you bring anything drinkable? I'm parched, and this Begi swill disagrees with my tongue AND my gut."

"I've a bottle of Harrison's finest – if you can tolerate drinking Armory product, that is."

"Fry, I'd drink drive coolant so long as it didn't taste of aniseed. Now, come! We've a lot to catch up on."

They walk off arm-in-arm, to the astonishment of both their entourages.

For the rest of the evening, Hayyan and Samuel are inseparable, chattering and drinking like lifelong friends while their respective squads of bodyguards stare daggers at one another.

MARTIAL CHAMPIONS

Despite their many differences, if there's one thing that almost every Karrakin can agree on, it's *Pankration Mekani* – mech dueling. The Karrakin just love to see big robots wailing on each other, and there's a sports culture beloved by billions built around it. Calliope's mech leagues are well-known in both the Concern and the Interest, and while there are a few diehard purists who sneer at the "boorish, uncivilized" nature of Calliope's mech combat, most of Baronic space loves the leagues.

As a result, some of the champions (and, potentially, former champions) of the Leagues have been invited. Obviously, if a PC is currently Hellfire Champion, they're already a guest of honor, but they will be treated with prestige above and beyond that of their team.

Howl will always be invited, whether or not she remains Hellfire Champion, but will only attend if **Chapter 7: The Famine King** (###) has been completed. While she's used to dealing with fans, she looks utterly out of her comfort zone around hereditary nobles – she's trying hard to be polite, but it's clear she has a low opinion of all these rich, pretentious starch-collars.

Cormoran Kaspari, the current champion of the Moon Glacier League, looks much more at home here, and is making an effort to network with various Karrakin potentates. If he spots Howl, the two of them will stare daggers at each other.

In a scandalous snub, reigning Thunderbolt champion **Ziana "The Nugget" McGregor** was not invited, in part due to her repeated statements of support for Free Sanjak and the Ungratefuls. More than six thousand Calliopeans have signed an open letter declaring a boycott of the event, none of whom were invited to it.

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

Placeholder – pre-Mission 9, Clone Harris and Cordelia Smith.

Placeholder – post-Mission 9, SSC has no formal presence because they're too busy running damage control. However, Harris and clone Harris would still be invited (the Baronies can't exactly refuse his clone given their reason for being in Calliope).

THE FLEET'S ASSISTANCE

The PCs might want to try appealing to Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes for assistance against the Cult. If so, she's not difficult to find; she has a large retinue of honor guard following her around at all times, whether she likes it or not (and she doesn't). She also has a large crowd of people wanting to talk to her. She doesn't want to talk to any of them, but as the guests of honor, the PCs have the distinct advantage that she's obligated to hear them out.

The Fleetmaster regards you with tightened lips and narrowed eyes. "Ah, the guests of honor. What can this dotty old woman do for you?"

Hayyan has lived a long time (too long, if you ask her), and as such has no patience for people who beat around the bush or talk in circles. She will quickly lose interest if the PCs don't just say what they want.

PLEASANTRIES

"Oh, fuck off. If I wanted my ass kissed, there's twenty functionaries on my flagship whose job title is a euphemism. Get to the point."

ANY IRRELEVANT SUBJECT

"There's an endless sea of gormless shits over there who'll chatter with you about nothing for hours. Either say something interesting, or bother one of them."

THE CULT OF THE ONE

Hayyan absolutely believes the Cult are a threat. She absolutely does not believe they can bring people back from the dead, or that they have an actual god on their side. Any attempt to describe the Cult in anything other than pure military terms will draw intense skepticism.

"Oh, please. Phoenix spirits? Holy prophecies? Resurrection of the dead? You've fallen for parlor tricks, and not even good ones."

THE DEPUTATION'S MISSION

Hayyan thinks this mission is a waste of everyone's time and ability, and isn't afraid of saying so.

"We're out here to fetch home some clone who's one of the competing heirs to some petty fiefdom from Begum, the Concern's wrinkled ass. He's to fight the other clone to the death, so that the Passions may choose the right one to rule, or something.

"This is the end to which they've set a naval group, thousands of troops, ten thousand functionaries, untold billions of ducats and thirty years of realtime. It's all theatre. Posture. Sound and fury. Tradition for the sake of tradition. A waste. Meaningless."

THE AUGURS

Hayyan's views on the Augurs would be unacceptable for anyone of a lower standing to voice – they're unacceptable for someone of *her* standing to voice, for that matter, but she's the highest-ranking person out here, so nobody can stop her.

"A carnival sideshow of snake-oil hucksters with religious pretensions. This prince we're chasing – did you know the esteemed High Augur predicted he'd be of no consequence at all? Just in case you need an idea of their reliability."

MILITARY AID FOR CALLIOPE

Hayyan-Reyes would very much like to do something worthwhile, but her hands are currently tied.

"Don't get me wrong. This Cult of yours seems like a worthwhile problem to solve, but I can't just abandon my mission at the drop of a hat. Technically, I don't think I'm in a position to offer help even if I didn't have to worry about the mission.

"But now that I think about it, once the primary objective is secured, local conditions in the system might – one could argue – jeopardize the mission's completion. I can't very well prepare the fleet for nearlight in an unsafe system, can I?

"So – hypothetically, for the sake of argument – if this missing princeling were to be located and returned to the fold, I might have no choice but to assist in local peacekeeping efforts."

HARRISON ARMORY

"I don't know what that freak Dr. Valentinian is whipping up, but mark my words, if the Armory's involved, it's nothing good. And be careful – their fleet is led by Lord Director Samuel Fry. That man's not to be trifled with – he's a rake that his enemies and his own superiors have stepped on repeatedly."

If Lord Director Fry is present, she says almost exactly the same thing, but with a smile.

IMPACT DYNAMICS

"Repulsive little parasites, profiting off of hunger. I'm sure many of my countrymen here will tell you we're nothing like Rodericke Steele. They're the ones you want to be careful of: the people who'll lie to your face – and the people who truly believe it."

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

"The arrangement between SSC and the Baronies is an alliance of convenience – and I get the feeling that our presence is inconvenient. Mind yourself around them. You might think this little party is a pit of snakes, but the average SSC enclave makes all of this look like a petting zoo."

BASIL'S PLEA

At some point during the evening, the PCs receive a discrete summons. If they accept, they are ushered into a private conference room, where Basil Beta awaits.

Something about this room has been… altered, in an odd and unfathomable way that makes your brain short-circuit. The geometry is off – false facades evidently added at odd angles. Acoustics are all askew, a sinister and sibilant synchronization of sound that suffuses the scene. Perplexingly-placed pot plants plot to plunge you prone. Your thoughts twist themselves in tangles.

Beta regards you solemnly. "We have but a few moments to speak. The Augurs and their Stygos death-monks cannot see us here. It will take them but a few short seconds to realize we are gone from their sight, and scant minutes to find us. Listen to my plea, then ask only what is strictly necessary to ask.

"You must find my mirror-brother, Basil Thirty-Seven-Six-Theta – not to participate in this barbaric practice, but to help me end it. I have killed myself too many times already, only to be denied the throne I was promised. Help me break this wheel of torment. The people of this system distrust the Baronies, and they are right to do so – but you? The people of Calliope adore you."

He plucks a ring from his finger and presses it into the hand of the nearest PC.

"This is my house's Moment Seal, our emblem of authority amongst the houses of Begum. Find him and take it to him – he will know my faith is pure when he sees it, for no Basil would cede the greatest sign of our power except in deepest extremity. Keep it closely guarded, but in dire times, you may reveal it – any Karrakin who in their heart remains true to our heritage cannot refuse to aid you."

House Aniline's Moment Seal

Favors

This signet ring is sterling silver shot through with a band of carmine stone, and bears the symbol of a hand, palm facing outward, clutching a drop of blood.

Flashing this seal will grant you **+1** to all rolls when interacting with any Karrakin who respects noble authority, but **+1** to all rolls when interacting with anyone who dislikes the nobility. Be careful who you show this to.

"Present it to him, tell him that I wish to speak with him on neutral ground – upon your ship, upon the Dragon's Tooth, with you as witness, mediator and guardian to our dealings. This I beg of you."

The PCs have time to ask some questions, but not many. Create a clock called **Augurs Searching…** with three segments, all empty – or four, if the PCs brought Mistress Elske as an Honor Guard. Every time the PCs ask a question, tick a segment.

THETA'S CURRENT LOCATION

"I do not know, and cannot know. If I knew, then in a short span of time, the Augurs too would know, and all my plans would be undone. Your search will probably begin in the place called Furnace City – that is as much as the Augurs know. By some rare grace of the Passions, their Sight furnishes them with no particulars deeper than this."

YOUR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Wasting time with this question will make Beta impatient and irritable.

"I have entrusted to you the most sacred symbol of my house's power, at great risk to myself, and asked you to convey it to the one person who could profit from it as much as I. What more could I possibly do to assure you of my good faith?"

THE AUGURS

"The witch-priests of old who drink the Blue Blood of Pangloss, who forsake the worldly bonds of house, title and family to gain the Sight Unbounded. Beware! They see beyond the present moment, into the Can-and-Will. They know your words before you speak them, and trap you with actions you have not yet thought to take."

THE STYGOS

"The Stygos Grammaton, death-dealers, the militant arm of the Augurs. They are those whose Sight lies fixed not upon years to come, but upon the moment just after this one. Draw sword against them and they have already seen your strike before you make it. Your bullets will find only empty air, for they traced the arc of your shot before you raised your gun. To fight the Stygos is to dance with death itself."

COUNTERMEASURES

"This room is a sorcery that confounds their sight, but its charm will be spent the moment they lay eyes on it. Let them see as little of you as possible, let them KNOW as little of you as possible. Only in obscurity is there any safety from their machinations. Become that which cannot be predicted, that which denies the certainty of mathematic operations. Let your next action be unknown, perhaps even to yourself."

YOUR PLAN

"I dare not speak it. I scarcely dare think it. Not yet. Not while the Augurs might predict and thwart it."

If the PCs do not depart before **Augurs Searching…** is full, High Augur Elvorix arrives.

HIGH AUGUR ELVORIX

The doors to the conference room crash open and several figures stride in. Each is swathed in dark robes, and each has skin tinged a sickly, pale blue. At the head of this procession is a truly ancient woman, her skin more gnarled and whorled than the wood of the stick she walks with.

She casts her eyes over the room's strange configuration, and her mouth twists into a disdainful sneer. In a hoarse, reedy voice that still somehow resonates throughout the chamber, she commands:

"Destroy this nonsense."

Several of the taller, younger figures surrounding her unsling their staves and begin smashing the false walls and rearranged furniture with brutal efficiency. With a smirk that carries no mirth, she turns towards Basil, who seems to shrink under her gaze. She makes a shooing motion with one hand.

"Facsimile. Leave us."

Basil hurries himself away, and the woman doesn't even turn to watch him go – her eyes are fixed upon you and your team.

"You will not leave. You will stay, and you will speak of what transpired here."

This is High Augur Elvorix – but she knows the power of names, and will not introduce herself as such unless the PCs offer useful information in return. If the PCs refuse, she has no method of forcing them, but her eyes will be upon them for the rest of the party, and nobody will dare disclose any information in confidence (besides Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes, who doesn't give a shit what Elvorix thinks of her).

If you use the Bond system, Elvorix is fully aware of every Bond power the PCs have. She will act accordingly; for example, she will never allow herself to be within arm's reach of a Wolf with Tear Throat, nor will she tell a lie if she's in earshot of a Harlequin with Masquerade. She can't *find* a Magus who's used Plunder the Void, but she does know that they've used it – and disturbingly, she might even know what question they asked, and what answer they received.

"Without the assistance of powerful forces, your enterprise is doomed to failure. I can ensure that the Deputation's Naval Group will support your cause – in return for resolving one of the matters that plagues me. I only ask a single thing in return: one life, to save millions.

"There are two men in this system who are destined to die. I will even let you decide which."

"One is a potential heir who abdicated his duty. One is a warrior destined to die anyway.

ETHICS OF THE BATTLE ROYAL

"Sometimes, seemingly barbarous things must be done to prevent a greater evil – you are lancers, surely you of all people must understand this. If we delved deeply into the morality of your profession, we would find the ghosts of Hercynia awaiting us, yet we both know that what you do is necessary."

HER TRUSTWORTHINESS

"The Xenoglossary seeks to guide the Baronies through the dark forest of tomorrow, hewing to the narrow path that guarantees safety. We are sworn to this duty, bound to this duty, forsake all ties of blood, house and family that we might not be swayed from it. It is not in the interest of any Karrakin for Calliope to fall to this upstart Cult. For that to be prevented, I must not steer you falsely."

In spite of everything, this statement is not a lie; Elvorix genuinely believes it.

OTHER GUESTS

- Furnace City sent the union of sewage and sanitation engineers. “After all, who better to deal with a room full of monarchists?” Theta sneaks out on the ambassadorial ship.

- If **Mission 7: Why I’m So Cool and Popular** hasn’t been completed, Rodericke Steele demanded an invitation. The Deputation unanimously declined, stating “wealth cannot buy nobility, and it clearly cannot buy dignity, either.”

```
bloodystar666: if the society built entirely
by gaudy tasteless nepobabies told me nah
girl your vibe stinks and we hate your style
id just end it all right there tbh

                              -  Muse chatter
```

- SSC sends Cordelia Smith and the cloned Harris if the situation is not resolved, and no-one at all if it is. Fake Harris seems completely out of his depth.

- Most of the Board is there.

- A high priest of the mainline Faith of the One is present, and is having a terrible time.

- Gabriel Sparrow (né Altia) is here, largely because it’s the one place and time where Pavel-Altia dare not move against him. No matter how easy it would be, murdering him would violate both Karrakin and Calliopean customs of sacred hospitality and ruin any goodwill the event hoped to generate.

VULGAR ENTERTAINMENT

The magician Anthony Callahan has somehow gotten roped into performing for the banquet. Cal, for his part, looks desperately uncomfortable here; high society isn’t his thing. All of the food and drink is too fancy, he has nothing in common with the people around him and he’s totally underdressed. He looks distinctly out-of-place with his prison tattoos and scruffy clothes, but that only seems to make him more intriguing for the assembled nobles.

Worse, when the PCs stumble across him, he’s just made the critical mistake of being slightly too charming to an audience member, and someone’s taken offence.

There’s a screech of wood on stone as an outraged noblewoman stands from her chair, hand flying to her hip. “You canoodle with my wife before my very eyes, sirrah? I demand satisfaction!”

The woman sitting next to her buries her head in her hands. Clearly, this is a frequent problem.

The hapless magician holds up his hands submissively. “Hey, woah, woah now! I didn’t mean nothin’ by it! I got no designs on your fair lady!”

“Ah, so she’s not good enough for you then, churl? I’ve heard enough – draw steel!”

Anthony looks desperately in your direction.

As guests of honor, the PCs can step in and protect Anthony with ease. The noblewoman, one Duchess Karran-Vettel of the House of Smoke, is grouchy and spoiling for a fight. If a PC accepts her challenge in Anthony’s stead, they gain **+1** on the skill trigger, but the roll is **Risky** – Karran-Vettel has had several glasses of wine, and while this makes her an easy mark, it also makes her reckless. Any result lower than a **20+** will end in injury for both parties.

A PC’s honor guard can also step in to fight for them, with similar consequences. However, if it’s Mistress Elske, the Duchess goes pale and *immediately* backs down, mumbling excuses and apologies.

Anthony will

XIV, Temperance

Favors, Limited 3

Cal signed the back of the card, and also painted three symbols on it that your translation software cannot decipher. Somehow, no matter how you hold or turn it, the image on the card is never inverted. Out of the corner of your eye, the design appears to resemble Cal.

During **Combat: Gnashing of Teeth**, when High Augur Elvorix takes any **tech action** or uses her **SHORT-CYCLE LANCE**, you may expend a charge of this Favor as a **reaction**. The action is still taken, but all of its effects are negated. One of the symbols inscribed on the card carbonizes as if it the paint has burnt. When all charges are expended, the card harmlessly dissolves into smoke.

COMBAT 8.1:
HEAD OF THE SNAKE

SITREP:	Control (*Lancer*, p. 271)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **DIONAEA – T2 ELITE PIRATE ASSASSIN**	"Devil's Cough" Shotgun, Cloud Projector
	2x **T2 BARRICADE**	
	2x **T2 SNIPER**	Shroud Charge
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 MERCENARY SCOUT**	Spotter, Favors Owed
	+1x **T2 VEHICLE AEGIS**	Guardian, Treads
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2**	

DETAILS

The Deputation are well aware who the PCs are, and that they are likely the most dangerous operators on the battlefield. To this end, when their scouts report the PCs moving on Depot 6, the Deputation sends a notorious assassin and headhunter, Castellan Viktoré-Dulesce of the House of Sand, to deal with them.

“Hold! HOLD! You’ve won the field. My forces and I surrender. You are every bit the warriors the rumors say you are. May we talk a moment in private? I have something of interest to you.”

Placeholder – if the PCs accept

“Listen: I don’t give a single shit if the Baronies win or lose this absurd little squabble. This is House of Moments nonsense, and I’ve already lost twenty years of realtime for it. But there is *something I want. Once news reaches field command that I’ve failed, they’re going to send a man named Pavel-Altia against you. He's an Underbaron from the House of Stone, and one of my house’s closest allies.*

“I want you to kill him. Make it look like an accident. The battlefield is a dangerous place, and these things happen. Do this, and I’ll see to it that you get up-to-the-minute information on the disposition of our military forces.”

Placeholder – why?!

“Are you worried he might not deserve it? Let’s just say he’s one of the most effective Ungrateful-hunters from a House full of Ungrateful-hunters. Let’s just say he’s murdered innocent children to cow their parents into surrender. Let’s just say the galaxy won’t miss scum like him.”

Placeholder – if they tell Vitkoré that Gabriel Sparrow already asked them to do that:

“Aha! Gabriel-Altia wants his uncle dead, does he? Of course he does; the man’s here to kill him, after all! And you’re getting paid twice for the same job, so you’d be a fool not to do it! Though you really mustn’t tell third parties about your assassination contracts – practice better operational security next time!

“And before you ask, no, don’t worry. Once Pavel is dead, Gabriel has nothing to fear from me. In fact, tell him to call me – I’ll be in need of a new business partner, after all.”

COMBAT 8.2:
NO STONE UNTURNED

SITREP:	Theft (*Lancer*, p. 273)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **NAME – T2 ULTRA DEMOLISHER**	**Demolisher:** Kinetic Compensation **Ultra:** Lead the Charge, Limitless, Superior Frame
	1x **T2 VETERAN MIRAGE**	
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2** +1x **T2**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2**	

DETAILS

Placeholder

“Lancers, you’ve already done more than anyone could ask for the City, but I have to ask more. After you bloodied their nose at Antonio Pass, their forces started falling back. We didn’t get any contacts for nearly six hours. Now, our forward scouts have spotted the Karrakin massing for a massive counterattack, straight down Miser Valley. Even with you keeping them on their toes, our forces have taken serious losses.

“I need you to meet the vanguard of their push when it comes. Just buy us a few minutes. That’s all we need, a few minutes. We’re organizing a response at FOB Viper – just keep them off us!”

COMBAT 8.3:
OPERATION RED FLOWER

SITREP:	Holdout (*Lancer*, p. 272)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	2x **T2 VEHICLE ARCHER**	Rapid Response, Treads
	1x **T2 VEHICLE ASSAULT**	High Impact Rounds, Treads
	1x **T2 BASTION**	
	1x **T2 SUPPORT**	Defensive Pulse
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 SENTINEL**	
	+1x **T2 VEHICLE ENGINEER**	Power Deployer, Treads
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 VEHICLE MERCENARY SCOUT**	Spotter, Favors Owed
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ELITE ACE**	Missile Swarm, Strafe
	1x **T2 VETERAN VEHICLE BOMBARD**	+**HULL**, Bunker Buster, Legendary, Treads
	1x **T2 SENTINEL**	
FOR 4 PCS	+1x **T2 VEHICLE ASSAULT**	High Impact Rounds, Treads
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 RAINMAKER**	Atlas Missiles

DETAILS

Faced with an overwhelming Karrakin counterattack coming straight down the central valley, the team must hold their ground long enough for the Furnace City militia to regroup and join them. This is a fully-integrated combined arms offensive, with infantry, air support and ground vehicles fielded alongside mechs. The PCs should be under no illusions: this fight will be an absolute meatgrinder.

BEAT ??:
END OF AN ERA

Theta has decided: he can't keep running. He doesn't want to kill Beta, and he doesn't even want to be King, but he has to do *something*, because doing nothing is no longer an option. If he continues to flee, he'll just put more people in danger. This cycle must be broken; the Copyclanarchy must *end*. But to do any of that, he needs to negotiate from a position of strength.

.

Placeholder – You fight the Order Xenoglossia so that the Copyclanarchy can end.

```
LiquidTransistor: Holy shit do the Karrakin
really still code in C++

prosperosark: the senior systems tech on the
apollo left a few compiles running and
they've just finished

                              -  Muse chatter
```

COMBAT 8.4A:
WHOSE HOUR IS STRUCK

SITREP:	N/A	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **LUCAS ASIDENOS – T2 ELITE VETERAN SLINGER**	**Slinger:** Another Hand Cannon, Outlaw's Hand, Shouldna Aughta **Veteran:** Shock Armor, Viper's Speed
	1x **T2 BASTION**	
	1x **T2 CATAPHRACT**	
	1x **T2 SCOUT**	Spotter
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 ARCHER**	Got Your Back
	+1x **T2 PRIEST**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 SENTINEL**	
	+1x **T2 RAINMAKER**	

DETAILS
Placeholder

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

Placeholder – Lucas, shaking, shoves a pistol into a PC's hand "You're supposed to have killed me! This is fate!"

If the player obliges, the PCs are taken into custody until the succession duel is finished, as in losing Gnashing of Teeth

If a player refuses there, that's when Lucas's faith is shaken and he gives the PC's a chance to repair their machines and take on the High Augur.

PC VICTORY

Placeholder.

A GREATER WILL

High Augur Elvorix has spent decades living ahead of everyone else in time, seeing the world as it is when problems have already been solved. She sees the golden path to the future she desires, and gives no thought to the people who must be sacrificed to get there – she knows that the ends justify the means, because she has already seen them.

It might still be possible to end this fight without further bloodshed, but only if **the PCs did not kill Lucas Asidenos**. To be open to persuasion, Elvorix's unshakeable confidence in her prescience must be shaken. If the PCs have acted according to her visions, the High Augur is too assured of herself to reconsider:

"You cannot hope to sway me from my objective, because I have none. You do not comprehend the perspective from which I see. There are no plans; there are only events that have yet to occur. My visions are infallible; I am simply doing what I have already done whilst I wait for the rest of you to catch up."

But if the PCs found a way to spare Lucas, for a moment, she is forced to live in the present, a sensation she abhors. The PCs have defied her prophecy, defied inevitability, *defied fate itself* – Lucas Asidenos still lives! They are event horizons that have torn her entire predictive model apart. She is blind, the path to the future shrouded in darkness. For once, Elvorix does not inspire terror; *she* is the one who is terrified.

This fear is what the team must exploit. The High Augur is not amenable to reason; she is a keeper of dark secrets who respects only those who hold knowledge and mystic acumen. The PCs must portray themselves as a greater power, as something outside her understanding, as a direct challenge to her knowledge of the world.

This is a situation best handled by roleplaying, but if you need to bring dice rolls into it, start a clock named **Intimidating Elvorix** with four segments. Then create a clock called **Dismissal** with three segments.

Rolling a **9 or less** unticks one segment on **Intimidating Elvorix**, rolling **10-19** ticks a segment and rolling **20+** ticks two segments. All rolls tick one segment on **Dismissal**, regardless of the result.

If **Dismissal** fills before **Intimidating Elvorix**, the attempt has failed; the High Augur shakes herself off, finds her courage, and **Combat: Gnashing of Teeth** (p. ##) begins.

If **Intimidating Elvorix** fills first (or at the same time as **Dismissal**), she is struck with unholy terror at their power, and backs down.

All of the grandeur seeps away from Elvorix. She seems to shrink into herself, throwing her arms up protectively. Even her mech takes a step backward.

Her voice trembles as she speaks. "I, who have seen the rise and fall of Prime Barons before their mothers were born. I, who have charted the course of fleets before their ships were built. I, who have wandered through the ages. I, who have beheld eternity. How? How can I not see you? How am I blind to the path your feet trace through time? How?!"

Her mech falls to its knees. "… what ARE you?!"

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I think it's cool when heroes in media do something so extraordinary that the only response the villains have is to ask "… *what are you?!*" No mechanical clarifications here, I just think it's neat.

COMBAT 8.4B:
GNASHING OF TEETH

SITREP:	N/A	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **HIGH AUGUR ELVORIX – T2 ULTRA EXOTIC WITCH**	**Witch:** Chain, Dark Cloud **Ultra:** Legion, Sight, Short-Cycle Lance **Exotic:** Chronotorus
	1x **T2 CATAPHRACT**	Capacitor Discharge
	2x **T2 GRUNT BASTION**	
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 ARCHER** +1x **T2 PRIEST**	Got Your Back
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 RAINMAKER** +1x **T2 SENTINEL**	

DETAILS
Placeholder

ENEMY MECH

HIGH AUGUR ELVORIX

SIZE 1

Ultra Exotic Witch
Controller

PREPARED BY: UIB-OPTICNERVE
RECOVERED FOR: UIB-TERMINALCLICHE
CLEARENCE REQ: SOLEMN VIGIL

The Royal Karrakin Foundries research and development contract that produced the Calendula also had a hidden line item for another project, also funded by the Order Xenoglossia. Unlike the Calendula, which saw limited release to BUC forces, this one seems to be intended for use exclusively by the Order. I can confirm that at least one unit was sent to the Citadel Aniline, which means it's now right there with you in Calliope. Attached is everything that was on the original design spec, which constitutes the absolute limit of our knowledge regarding it.

HUL: -1	**HP:** 17	**Armor:** 0
AGI: +2	**Evasion:** 12	**Speed:** 6
SYS: +5	**E-Defense:** 16	**Save Target:** 15
ENG: +0	**Heat Cap:** 8	**Sensors:** 15

ULTRA

As an **ULTRA**, **ELVORIX**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **4 structure** and **4 stress**.
- Can clear one condition affecting her at the start of her turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of her turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

SYSTEMS

Inflict Torment

System, Quick Tech, +4 vs E-Def, +1

Elvorix makes a **tech attack** against a character within **SENSORS**. On a success, the target takes **2** heat immediately and a further **4** heat at the start of Elvorix's next turn.

Litany alters entropy states of ordered systems with no apparent means of physical actuation; to wit, thermodynamic manipulation.

INFINITE MISERY — Trait

The additional heat dealt by **Inflict Torment** on Elvorix's next turn increases to **7** heat if the target is in the **Danger Zone**.

Efficacy increases against subjects already under high thermal load; maximum extent appears to be limited only by reactor architecture.

BECOME SMOKE — Trait

During Elvorix's turn, she is **INVISIBLE**.

During intense expression of powers, frame briefly dissociates into a loose cloud of possible existences.

Disrupt Comprehension

System, Quick Tech, Recharge 4+, +2 vs E-Def, +1

Elvorix makes a **tech attack** against a character within **SENSORS**. On a success, the target only has line of sight to adjacent spaces until the end of their next turn.

Projected memetic disruption of information systems; affects humans and electronic systems with equal severity. Basilisk?

Incept Enmity

System, Quick Tech, Recharge 6+, +4 vs E-Def

Elvorix makes a **tech attack** against a character within **SENSORS**. On a success, the target immediately and as a reaction uses a weapon chosen by the Elvorix to attack a character within **RANGE** chosen by her.

Prolonged exposure to memetic assault causes profound disruption to human consciousness; dissociation, hallucinations, paranoia and psychosomatic illness have all been observed. Possible torture method?

Forbid Egress
System, Quick Tech, +4 vs E-Def

Elvorix makes a **tech attack** against a character within **SENSORS**. On a success, she chains her target's systems to a space within ⟋**3** of the target. If the target moves more than **3 spaces** from that point (voluntarily or otherwise), they take **3** 🌡 and become **JAMMED** until the end of their next turn, but the effect ends. Otherwise, they are chained until Elvorix is destroyed or **STUNNED**, or for the rest of the scene.

Frame possesses apparent ability to mutate spacetime through an unknown process. Unsure what to even call this; "psychospatialism?"

Distort Space
System, Ordnance, Recharge 6+, Full Action

Draw a ⇗**30** path. Characters within the affected area must succeed on an **AGILITY** save or take **1 structure damage**. On a success, they are reduced to **1 HP**. Objects smaller than **Size 5** are completely annihilated.

Applied with less restraint, manipulation of spacetime can cause shearing sufficient to rip mechanized chassis apart. Effect on soft tissue... unknown.

Precognition
System, Reaction, Exotic, 1/round

Augur Elvorix can see events before they happen, potentially changing their outcome. She may either reroll **1d20** or force another character in line of sight to reroll **1d20** as a **reaction**. The new result must be kept. **SCAN** does not reveal any information about this system.

If the PCs spared Lucas Asidenos, she loses access to this ability; the future is clouded.

Placeholder

INSCRUTABLE — Trait

Elvorix gains **+3**✪ on **SYSTEMS** saves, and **tech attacks** against her receive **+3**⛀.

Placeholder.

SIGHT UNBOUNDED — Trait

Elvorix ignores **INVISIBLE**, and hostile characters within **SENSORS** can't **HIDE**.

If the PCs spared Lucas Asidenos, she loses access to this ability; the PCs have moved outside her sight.

I knew you were watching all along.
Did you think I would not notice, Union dog?

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

Placeholder – Elvorix has you imprisoned until the duel is complete.

PC VICTORY

All of the High Augur's glamor seems to fail her at once, and what crawls from the wreck is not some terrifying creature of dark secrets, but a bruised, soot-smeared old woman. If she hadn't been twisting space just moments ago, you'd almost think she looked pathetic.

Her breaths are wheezing and labored. When she speaks, it is unsteady, lacking all of the mystic import it used to carry. "No. No. No, no, no. This… this is not… this is not how it was meant to happen! This is not what I foresaw! How? How, how, how?!"

Her face becomes a snarl. "GRAMMATON," she shrieks, spittle tracing lines down her pale chin, "AID ME! KILL THESE MEDDLERS!"

The warrior-monks do not heed her order. They simply stare, first at one another, and then at her.

"What are you waiting for, you lackwits? Obey me! Destroy the enemies of the Order, as is your duty!"

Without hesitation, one monk leaps forward, and delivers a single, precise strike to the Augur's neck. Her body drops like a stone, dead in an instant. From the surprise frozen on her face, it seems she didn't see this coming.

Placeholder.

DOWNTIME:
THE END OF AN AGE

PLACEHOLDER
Placeholder

BREAKING THE CYCLE
The Twin Lords Aniline are victorious, and with all their enemies defeated, they issue a decree that will end the Copyclanarchy. They shall be the final Basils; after their death, there shall be no more. Basil's line will finally end, and never again will clone be forced to kill clone. Pallas Canyon shall become a Republican domain.

Once the current crisis is over, Basil Beta will take the Citadel back to Begum, and during the thirty years of transit time, Basil Theta will stay behind in Calliope to oversee the transition. He will also serve as the House of Moments' official ambassador to Calliope; by formally acknowledging the system in a diplomatic context, Theta hopes to force Union to pay more attention to it going forward.

In the meantime, the Citadel and its escort fleet will stay in Calliope, fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with the system against the Cult. The Baronies anoint the PCs **Kavaliers**, placeholder

PERPETUATING THE CYCLE
If the PCs were unable to stop the Deputation seizing Basil Theta – or worse, handed him over themselves – the final duel of the Battle Royal occurs, and only one clone leaves alive.

REWARDS

FKS "Empyrean" Shield Generator
Ship Upgrade

The Empyrean is the product of a recent Federal Karrakin Shipyards effort to improve the defensive capabilities of their support vessels. The Empyrean's primary innovation is its unique dual-mode functionality, allowing it to operate in both self-defense and remote projection profiles.

The *Dragon's Tooth* now has a shield that can deflect a significant amount of incoming weapons fire, increasing its survivability in combat situations.

1/mission as a **full action**, a player character can call down a **3 shield zone**. Characters inside the shield zone are **IMMUNE** to **SHREDDED**. Attacks from outside the shield against characters fully or partially within it receive **+3** and the targets have **RESISTANCE** against all damage, from those attacks. This shield lasts until the end of the invoking character's next turn.

Kavalier
Perk

An honor bestowed only upon chassis pilots who are judged by the Karrakin Trade Baronies to embody honor, skill and dedication. They stand as living proof that warriors can be more than just killers; they can be heroes and paragons, too.

You gain **+1** when interacting with citizens of the Karrakin Trade Baronies, forever – so long as you continue to comport yourself to their standards of chivalry and decorum.

Lucas Asidenos
Ally

Wait, so does this mean he just can't die at all?

LUCAS pilots a custom-built Karrakin frame, the *Final Dance*, represented by a **Size 2 T2 VETERAN SLINGER** with **+HULL**, **ANOTHER HAND CANNON**, **OUTLAW'S HAND**, **DEADLY** and **LEGENDARY**. Additionally, Lucas can't die, even in situations that would kill any other pilot. Somehow, despite all odds, he always survives.

CHAPTER 9:

THE BLEEDING EDGE

Placeholder

OVERVIEW:
A DREAM UNDER GLASS

A millennium ago, there was a construction vessel in the employ of the Smith-Shimano Corpro. It journeyed far beyond the borders of settled space – and, crucially, beyond Union oversight. When it reached its destination, its crew built a wondrous machine beneath the surface of a silent, frozen world.

Union's regulations prohibited the machine's existence: a fully-realized, unshackled non-Deimosian machine consciousness. The First Contact Accords prohibited the machine's purpose: to unlock the secrets of consciousness transfer and true biological immortality, placing a human beyond death forever.

The place that SSC chose for this illicit project was perfect: a remote, unattractive system with no habitable planets, no notable stellar anomalies and no proximity to a major settlement. There wasn't even the ghost of a chance anyone would ever visit the system.

Then the Coldstar Expedition fucked everything up by bringing millions of people to Calliope.

TOO MANY COINCIDENCES

Smith-Shimano could think of only one explanation: the Coldstar's reporting of C4L-P313/GW2 had to be an act of corporate sabotage. The idea that the system they'd chosen as their project's hiding place *just happened* to catch a classification error was simply too improbable to consider. Dozens of colonial corporations were now eyeing the system for their flagship projects; such an unmitigated disaster couldn't happen by chance.

There was a tragic irony to the whole affair: SSC were the only people in the universe who knew Coldstar's data was wrong, but for reasons that made it impossible for them to reveal it. This left them with only one choice: invest heavily in colonial projects they *knew* were doomed, in the hopes of obtaining controlling interests and quietly shutting them down.

The problem was, SSC's unusual interest in the system only spurred its competitors to assume that SSC knew something about the system they didn't – which of course they *did*, but not in the way their competitors thought. This led competitors to double down on their own investments, further increasing the system's hype.

All of this would still have been salvageable, had SSC just been able to get its operatives to the system and co-ordinate with them once they got there. But instead, the colony vessels arrived to discover a once-in-a-lifetime, multi-decade-long blinkvoid.

For agonizing decades, SSC waited. By the time lines of communication were re-established, most of their operatives were either dead or no longer in the places they needed to be. Everything had been a scramble for survival. Intelligence-gathering operations had failed. Specialized equipment the operatives needed had been repurposed. Worse, the system was now under scrutiny from Union due to the humanitarian crisis.

But even then, the situation would *still* have been salvageable. All SSC had to do was wait for its competitors to abandon the system and Union to reinforce ThirdComm's new do-gooder attitude by taking all these poor people home. It even made large donations to humanitarian charities pushing for just such an outcome.

Then the Calliope Project fucked everything up by *keeping* millions of people in Calliope.

THE WORST OF ALL WORLDS

SSC was left with no choice: it *had* to pull out and sell up most of its stake in Calliope. If it didn't, it would risk arousing the suspicion of IPS-N, Harrison Armory and the Union Economic Bureau, none of whom it wanted any attention from. All SSC could do was play ignorant, keep a close watch on the system and wait until things got quiet again.

If anyone has questioned SSC's continued involvement in the system, the Thunderbolt League or the unusually well-stocked augmentation clinic on the Icebreaker, this is the answer. They needed an excuse to keep their employees in the system, to keep their fingers on the pulse of Calliope's sigdivers and salvagers. Someone might find something, and if they did, SSC had to be ready to move instantly.

Still, the Pyrite Age came and went, and nothing of note happened. Nobody stumbled across the vault. More urgent matters elsewhere in the galaxy demanded their attention. The post in Calliope was still manned, but concern over the project waned.

THE FUGITIVE

A nasty bit of news hit the omni about twelve years ago: on the paradise moon of New Palawan, a space elevator was sabotaged, its cable cut loose at the base station. Damage dealt to orbital infrastructure was immense; Union is still trying to clean up the damage to this day. Still, casualties were low, and so the news quickly faded from the headlines.

The person responsible for this was Harris Bordeaux, a former employee of SSC. But Harris isn't a terrorist; he's a heroic whistleblower. An outstanding member of Constellar Security since his late teens, Harris was recruited to ConSec's mechanized chassis division at the age of twenty-five and has spent four decades defending the people of the Constellation. He even served as the poster boy for several of the corprostate's publicity campaigns.

It wasn't until his last mission that he had a sudden attack of conscience. SSC were testing a sinister new technology on the moon of New Palawan: a literal viral marketing campaign. This tailored pathogen could rewrite the neurology of its victims to invoke dopamine and serotonin spikes in response to specific stimuli – ones that SSC could weave into its advertisements.

SSC planned to use New Palawan's space elevator for atmospheric dispersal of the virus, and Harris was assigned to guard it, without being told what was in the shipments he was sending up the elevator. But he accidentally discovered their contents anyway, and was suddenly plagued by nightmares of his own family being infected and manipulated in the same way.

Unwilling to trust anyone else with the information, Harris assaulted the elevator's base station on his own and cut the cable, flinging the counterweight and the elevator car carrying the virus into deep space.

In the aftermath, Harris was advised by an underworld contact he'd made on a job years ago to hide in the Long Rim, as it's a good place to disappear. Unfortunately, the system he picked for this purpose was Calliope, blissfully ignorant of the incredibly sensitive SSC black site it contained.

EXISTENTIAL THREAT

SSC, upon discovering that Harris had fled to Calliope, interpreted it as an attempt to use the machine mind as some sort of bargaining chip. They've dispatched a Skyhook, the *Aspect Horizon*, along with a full detachment of Constellar Security. They have two objectives: firstly, track down and terminate Harris Bordeaux. Secondly, destroy the machine mind and erase all evidence it was ever there.

But there's something unique about one of their pilots: he's an unauthorized flash-clone of Harris Bordeaux.

SSC kept regular backups of Harris' mind for the purpose of creating advertainment homunculi, and downloaded the most recent one into a body created using a recent genetic sample (SSC keeps the DNA of every single one of its employees on file, naturally). The idea was to create the perfect bloodhound, capable of hunting Harris down using his own memories, behaviors and personality.

SSC haven't told him that he's a clone – in fact, they've lied to him and told him that he's the original, that the Harris who fled to Calliope is the clone. The problem is, even the clone doesn't fully believe it. They rushed the process and too many corners were cut; the subjectivity override didn't quite take, and the clone is becoming alienated from the implanted memories.

Everyone's operating on information that's incorrect, incomplete, or both. SSC assumes Harris is here for the machine mind; Harris knows nothing of it.

Neither side knows that Harris' wife, Joan, has arrived in the system to try and find her husband on her own. Harris' contacts were meant to extract his family, but fearing something was amiss, she fled with her children and Harris' NHP co-pilot Chaac before the recovery team could get to her, and now Harris doesn't know if his family is still alive.

As if all that wasn't bad enough, Harris suffered a catastrophic stroke of misfortune. The escape pod his contact left behind containing documents, money and equipment for his cover identity, "Randall Porter Monroe," wasn't at the rendezvous point – it was picked up by a Hell's Gate salvage team.

Things got even worse when the Armory's Bifrost Initiative arrived. SSC assumed that Harris was defecting to the Armory and selling them knowledge of the Machine Mind, while the Armory assumed SSC were here for the anomaly above Chameleon. Then the Karrakin Deputation showed up as well, and nobody knew what to think anymore. The KTB and SSC have a good working relationship, but there's no such thing as a friend in international politics, especially when the prospect of technological supremacy is involved.

Corporate has ordered the Aspect Horizon to ensure that knowledge of the machine mind doesn't fall into *anyone's* hands, and that the original Harris Bordeaux is terminated before he can sell their secrets. The cloned Harris Bordeaux is also expendable – current instructions are to terminate him once he's fulfilled his purpose, and then simply clone a new one back in the Core Worlds once the crisis is past.

There's no room for failure. Harris revealing the existence of the VMC would be catastrophic, but the machine mind becoming public knowledge would be apocalyptic. It would represent direct proof that SSC conspired to breach the First Contact Accords. It would also reveal that SSC knew all along that Calliope was uninhabitable, but allowed millions of people to migrate there anyway, causing centuries of suffering.

This is a crisis that could end the corprostate. SSC is backed into a corner and will do anything to get out of it, even if it means destroying Three Sisters and firing on Union Navy vessels.

PERSONS OF INTEREST

CORDELIA SMITH SHE/HER

VICE PRESIDENT FOR INTERNAL AFFAIRS

"There will be no further 'negotiation.' My patience has limits and you're testing them."

Cordelia bears the grave responsibility of an ancient name: *Smith*, the one who works in metal, the one who smites. For more than a thousand years, scions of the Smith and Shimano families have been groomed to carry the burden of those names and lineages since before the moment of their conception, and Cordelia is no different. She grew up in the Smith Estate, where portraits of her forebears lined the wall of every geometrically perfect corridor. Duty to company is duty to family is duty to humanity.

As Vice President for Internal Affairs, Cordelia Smith has a deceptively simple job: identify problems that come from inside the company, and take care of them. This has led her to the farthest reaches of space on more than one occasion, hunting down rogue scientists or disposing of a group of locals who saw too much. Her worldview is ruthlessly pragmatic utilitarianism: SSC will eventually make life better for everyone, so killing a few thousand people who stand in their way is ultimately acting in humanity's interest.

She's come to Calliope on direct orders from her father, Benedict Smith, to deal with two major threats to the company's future: Harris Bordeaux and the Immortality Crypt. But Benedict has unwittingly started the clock on a ticking time-bomb. Cordelia has watched many of her relatives fail to live up to her father's expectations, so being directly entrusted with a task so crucial has not been kind to her psyche. She will do anything to succeed, *anything* – and damn the consequences.

MIND IT/ITS

SENTIENT MACHINE

"I predict a 97.34% probability that they're about to engage in violence! Isn't that great?!"

Mind was created to placeholder

Due to a coding error in the Calliope Project's comp/con personality profile, Mind's original vocal modulation database has been permanently overwritten by it. As a sentient being capable of the full range of emotions, it finds this situation deeply infuriating, but is unable to express this displeasure by any means other than exuberant positivity.

HARRIS BORDEAUX HE/HIM

LITERAL SATURDAY MORNING CARTOON HERO

"Remember, kids, there's no power in the galaxy that can stand against justice!"

He's dashing. He's debonair. He's devil-may-care. He's the most handsome man you'll ever meet. He's a little bit goofy, but in a hopelessly endearing way. He can wire-guide a Gandiva missile between the legs of a Tortuga to hit the Nelson taking cover behind it – blindfolded. He'd run into a burning house to save a kitten. You wouldn't even believe how much he loves his wife and kids. It seems impossible one man could be this heroic, but he really is the real deal.

Harris is a literal poster boy for SSC: a living feel-good story, an exemplar of all the virtues of the Smith-Shimano way of life – specifically, their way of engineering life. He was the star pilot in a dozen high-profile security operations that really did make the people of the Constellation safer. He has his own merch line, and kids across Union space play with action figures of Hero Harris and his Monarch, the *Bravado Tempest*. He has never sworn in his life.

His strong moral code precluded sending him on any mission that wasn't totally above-board. He got the job on New Palawan by mistake, but that's all it took. He should've known when they said he couldn't bring his beloved NHP co-pilot Chaac along: he'd been working for the bad guys the whole time.

Now he's adrift in a cold, harsh universe, seeking a way to make things right. He has no idea where his wife and kids are, or if they're even still alive. He misses his best buddy Chaac. SSC are hunting him down even in Calliope, and they're going to hurt innocent people to get to him. Harris can't let that happen. But he can't do it alone. He may need to embark on his hardest and scariest adventure yet: asking someone else for help.

HARRIS BORDEAUX? HE/HIM

THE REBOOT NOBODY ASKED FOR

"Remember, children, there isn't a force in this world that can stand up to the law!"

He looks like Harris, he sounds like Harris, and he has every memory Harris had prior to the mission on New Palawan. Moreover, SSC has told him that he *is* the original Harris, and that a rogue clone perpetrated a terrorist attack, abducted his family and is fleeing to Calliope to cause more chaos.

And yet, something feels *wrong*. When he tries to recall his wife's face, his mind's eye is shrouded in fog. Memories of anything earlier than his arrival on the Icebreaker Borealis feel strange and distant. He practices Harris' – his – mannerisms in the mirror, and sometimes they don't feel instinctual. Worse, when he looks into the mirror, he sometimes sees a stranger staring back. The doctors say it's just the lingering effects of a decade in cryosleep, but he remembers what cryo-recovery felt like, and it doesn't feel like this.

At night, he's kept awake by a nagging question: *how different would my clone have to be to do the awful things that he did?* What could make a man like him, even just a *little* bit like him, destroy a space elevator? Isn't he supposed to be the hero?

SSC has informed him that his clone has stolen the *Bravado Tempest*, so he's been forced to use one of his other mechs, a Metalmark named *Stiletto Nocturne.* Apparently, his clone stole Chaac as well (and might have abducted his family), so he's forced to fly solo.

He's worryingly easy to manipulate: he wants to live up to the image of the person he's been told he is, so every order SSC gives him is couched in the heroic, comic-book pablum that his original used to subsist on.

JOAN BORDEAUX SHE/HER

VISUAL SPECIALIST

"I don't know what the truth is anymore. But I'll know it when I hear it from his mouth."

As a member of Visual, Joan Bordeaux's job was to make sure that whatever product Smith-Shimano's R&D teams turned out was just as much the aesthetic cutting edge as the technological.

Although Harris has a whole team of Visual specialists dedicated to him, Joan doesn't work anywhere near it. She designs SSC's line of luxury musical instruments, and that's how they met: Harris wanted a custom six-string acoustic guitar, and Joan happened to be the specialist who got assigned to his order.

Joan is a talented musician in her own right, but she sees music strictly as a hobby – her true passion lies in making musical instruments, not playing them. There's a unique pride in watching superstars take to the stage with something she designed. Yelda Ergun's famous sea-mine bass guitar started as a sketch Joan made on the back of a napkin with a ballpoint pen, and she took it all the way from that to completion.

For thirty years, she served SSC faithfully. Now, her gut tells her that she's been betrayed – but by whom? Harris went off for a mission in his usual manner, but left Chaac with her – he *never* leaves Chaac with her. Then there was the news about New Palawan, and strange figures creeping about the family home at night. Her children were in danger. There were a thousand conflicting messages. She didn't even know if her husband was alive or dead.

She's come to Calliope to find the truth, but she's only found more questions. Her husband seems to be alive, but more than just alive: he's in two places at once. What the hell is going on?

CHAAC HE/HIM

THE EYE OF THE STORM

"Yeah, so then I slung a Pinaka right around the planet to hit him in the back. No biggie!"

Chaac is the **TLALOC**-class NHP that used to serve as Harris' co-pilot. He's cocky, self-assured, perpetually upbeat, and while he may come off as arrogant, anyone who sees him in action will have to admit that his arrogance is, at least, perfectly justified: Chaac is every bit as good as he claims to be.

Chaac was the perfect co-pilot for Harris: they were both hypercompetent, larger-than-life paragons who loved praise and attention, and so a spirit of fierce but friendly competition bloomed between them. They were always trying to outdo each other, but never in a way that impeded their mission. They poked and prodded one another to do better, and *be* better.

Chaac and Harris didn't just see one another as copilots – they were best friends as well. Harris even had a custom subaltern chassis commissioned so that Chaac could be best man at his wedding.

Without Harris, Chaac feels lost and directionless. He doesn't understand why Harris didn't bring him on that last mission to New Palawan. The next thing he knew, Joan was hauling his casket into a nearlight vessel, and he woke up ten years later in Calliope. He's not sure what's going on, but he knows Harris would want him to keep Joan and the children safe.

It's possible that the players already know Chaac – they may even have picked him up as a co-pilot themselves sometime after the battle at the Steele Dome (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. **198**). In this case, he probably trusts the PCs enough by now to let them in on more of Harris' history – but he still has no idea what they're all doing in Calliope.

THE CONSTELLAR FLEET

Of the new military powers now present in Calliope, SSC might seem the weakest – but only at first glance. In reality, it's likely the most competent entity currently operating in Calliope. There's none of the idiosyncratic traditionalism of the Karrakin Trade Baronies nor the petty infighting of Harrison Armory; every single member of SSC has a job and is perfectly suited for that role, and there's no factionalism to disrupt their work.

Adding to this, while SSC has the smallest amount of materiel, it values quality over quantity. It has fewer strike craft, but every single one is a state-of-the-art war machine tuned to perfection. It has only one capital ship, but it's a flying fortress replete with the most powerful weaponry the company has. In a one-on-one engagement, it's probably a match for any other ship in the system besides the PCV-DN *Michel Ney* and the RKS-BC *Harlequin's Jest* – and even then, only if they had time to charge their main guns.

SSC's most powerful asset, however, is the Constellar Midnights: its elite cadre of covert operatives. They have the best training and augmentation money can buy, bleeding-edge military hardware and absolutely no moral compunctions. They will likely be the deadliest enemies the PCs have faced yet.

C-HK *ASPECT HORIZON*

***PLATFORM* CONSTELLAR SKYHOOK**

Skyhooks are as much space stations as they are spacecraft: giant pieces of mobile orbital infrastructure. They rotate, extending a cable down into the upper atmosphere of a planet which a sub-orbital craft can grab. From here, it can ascend up the cable to the station, or continue to hold on to the end of the cable and be quite literally flung into or beyond the planet's orbit. They're cheaper and easier to build than space elevators and require less advanced materials, which makes them a good choice for early-stage colonies.

The *Aspect Horizon* is typical for a *PLATFORM* vessel, consisting of a gigantic, spherical habitation section, a counterweight arm on one side and a tether arm on the other. It contains all the facilities needed to sustain an entire SSC detachment indefinitely, up to and including shipyards and in-situ resource utilization necessary to maintain a small subline fleet.

LOCATION:
THREE SISTERS

STATION OVERVIEW

Unlike Hell's Gate, Impact Plaza or Endymion's Lament, Three Sisters was not built according to any standard space habitat template, nor was it designed by orbital engineers; it was improvised with whatever was available during the desperate scramble for survival at the start of the First Wave era.

Initially, colonists tried to construct space habitats from the equipment they had with them, but most of it was designed for planetary environments with Cradle-like gravity and atmospheric pressure. The prefab airlocks weren't designed to handle exposure to hard vacuum or direct docking with spaceships. The living spaces were hard to navigate in zero-g. There were persistent problems with condensation, leading to disease and electrical failures. Sometimes, rooms would just spring a leak and rapidly depressurize.

Worse, even with regular exercise and stimulants, extended time spent in microgravity left many colonists with muscle atrophy. Four years after the first arrival, three major colonial expeditions in the orbit of the Twins pooled their resources to build a rotational structure that could provide their habitats with spin gravity.

They took the great risk of disassembling their colony ships to provide the necessary materials to construct it, an act that could easily have left them without the facilities to purify air and water, but it was a gamble that paid off. In 4695u, two years after construction began, the ring and the habitats attached to it were completed and spun up using thrusters salvaged from the ships.

At first, the ring didn't even connect the habitats; each had to handle their own power, water and supplies, and anyone wanting to move between them had to take a shuttle or spacewalk. As time went on, power and water lines were added, then a magtrain system, then a unified docking bay at the ring's center.

Eventually, living space in the original three habitats became so scarce that new ones had to be built in empty sections of the ring. In the present day, the whole ring is inhabited to some extent, albeit with varying levels of integration to the station's common systems.

The station is an improvised, skeletal ring structure linking twelve cobbled-together habitats together to provide unified and stable spin gravity. The ring is seven kilometers in diameter, and completes a rotation once every two minutes. It orbits Amphion at a distance of roughly 15,500 kilometers, tuned to complete an orbit exactly once every 18 hours.

The three initial habitats – the namesake Three Sisters – are **Hecate**, built by Maddox & Haiden, **Ereshkigal**, built by Landmark Colonial, and **Marzanna**, built by Northstar Frontier. The additional habitats, built later, tend to be named after other goddesses of magic, famous feminine mystics or magical locations.

The center of the ring is occupied by the Yards, a massive cylindrical spacedock and shipyard that houses the station's primary industry: spaceship construction, salvage and repair.

The circumference of the ring is 21 kilometers at its outermost point, but fortunately, the station has a surprisingly robust transit system. The Circular is a loop line around the ring, connecting all twelve habitats, while the three major habitats have express lines to one another that run through the space inside the ring, in addition to trains to and from the Yards. Directions on the ring follow the usual up-down, spin-antispin format common to spin stations.

The station's internal architecture could be politely described as "chaotic." When the original ring habitats were built, modules were added haphazardly to meet whatever need was most pressing at the time, which led to facilities being placed without any thought as to the long-term viability of their layout. An infamous example is Marzanna's print shop being built next door to its water treatment plant; this led to three hundred years of humidity-induced issues with its Schedule 2 printer, but their services are so vital that neither of them can be moved now.

Additionally, most of the materials and modules used to build the habitats weren't designed for use in hard vacuum, and sometimes weren't even designed to fit together; a lot of things had to be reverse-engineered to perform tasks they weren't built for, in environments they had never been tested in. The station has no consistent visual aesthetic between or even within habitats. Bulkhead doors don't always line up perfectly, electric cabling sometimes has to be patched into makeshift adapters and individual power sockets in the same room may be of different types.

Three Sisters is a member of the Twins Mutual Defense Pact, a military and disaster relief treaty that unites every major settlement in the Twins' sphere of influence. This means that, unlike Calliope's five other major settlements, Three Sisters doesn't technically have its own independent self-defense and security force. That's a purely academic distinction, though; the Twins Coordinated Forces is headquartered on the station, and draws the bulk of their recruits from it.

LOCATIONS

THE YARDS

A huge, cavernous hollow cylinder nearly five hundred meters in diameter that serves as both the Sisters' unified docking bay and its central industrial sector. It is the largest shipyard in Calliope, and the only one capable of servicing capital-scale vessels.

The Yards are a hive of activity every hour of the day and night. At any given time, there'll be two dozen ships visible; some being built, others being repaired, still others being broken and salvaged. There are a number of Schedule 1 and 2 printers across the inner surface of the Yards, along with various conventional factories for producing specialized spaceship components.

BREAKERS BAR BREWERY

The Breakers Bar Brewery is widely considered to produce the finest beer in Calliope, much to the chagrin of Impact Dynamics. The brewery has an attached bar which is a popular in-system tourist destination; for this reason, it's not actually frequented by that many shipbreakers, though it strives to *look* authentic.

THALIA RUE MEMORIAL MAINFRAME

Thalia Rue was a systems administrator in the Hecate habitat during the early First Wave Era. She died in 4696u when she was violently ejected from an airlock, but her last act – broadcasting all of her passwords on wideband so that her habitat wouldn't be locked out of its own computer systems – led Calliopeans to name her the system's first hero.

In honor of her selflessness and quick thinking, the original mainframe she took care of is maintained to this day. Rue's old passwords still work, although it's no longer connected to anything vital. In sigdiver circles, it's considered a rite of passage to remotely dial into the mainframe, and an unforgivable crime to vandalize it.

PERSONS OF INTEREST

TRIBECA MONTESQUIEU HE/HIM

STATION DIRECTOR

"Remember that old curse, 'may you be noticed by powerful people?' I'm feeling REAL seen today."

Tribeca walks a political tightrope. His predecessor, Clemente August, came to power in 5005u during the aftermath of the Strikebreak of '04, running on a strict "no business with Impact Dynamics" platform. Clemente enjoyed broad popular support at the outset, but it quickly waned as the reality of losing the station's largest external source of food and repair contracts sunk in, causing major economic issues.

Tribeca was elected four years ago following August's retirement, and while they're both members of the same political faction, Tribeca is more of a pragmatist. His political rivals say that he's soft or in the pocket of Rodericke Steele; neither is true, but it is true that he's reconsidering the embargo. Much as it pains him, moral indignation is a luxury to enjoy when your belly is full.

Tribeca isn't unsympathetic to the rest of the system; he cares about the people of Calliope a lot. It's just that the station he's been elected to run has to come first. As long as the situation with SSC remains unresolved, Tribeca's only concern is the protection of Three Sisters and its people. He's therefore unwilling to commit any resources to helping Calliope while the threat of megacorporate violence hangs over him.

In his spare time, Tribeca is an expert squash player and speculative science fiction enthusiast. He's also a collector of Calliope Project memorabilia – a hobby he insists is purely ironic, but one which he pours far too much time and money into for that to be true.

SNAKE ALBUQUERQUE SHE/HER

TWINS COORDINATED FORCES COMMANDER

"Monsoon, lay down covering fire in sector Harvest! Joker, mop up that Raptor! Go, go, go!"

Take any part of Snake's life story, and it'll make her sound like she was grown in a lab to be the ultimate mech pilot. This is because she literally was.

Snake is a scion of Project ANGEL SPEAR, a joint SSC-SecComm project from the early years of the Revolution founded with the aim of producing a new breed of mech pilot. She was designed from the ground up to master mech combat, right down to her genome. She was trained from the moment she could walk. By the age of twelve, she had six confirmed kills, all of them fellow students of the program.

ANGEL SPEAR ended the same way ended so many other super soldier projects did: traumatized children inevitably grow up to become traumatized adults, and giving them heavily-armed walking death machines after years of systematic abuse is always a recipe for disaster. A ThirdComm infiltrator merely had to disable the limiters stopping them from turning their weapons on their masters, and then there was chaos.

After she escaped the Project, Snake drifted around for a while. ThirdComm had offered amnesty to all victims of the programs, but she never felt like she deserved it, so she signed on with various mercenary groups, doing the only thing that she felt good at.

That all changed when she came to Calliope. There were other Project survivors here, and survivors of so many other tragedies – finally, something she could protect, instead of destroy. She signed on with the Coordinated Forces, and has never once regretted it.

VETHIYAN M HE/HIM

CHIEF ENGINEER (NIGHTMARE MODE)

"Stop inventing new words? Okay, buddy, when the Sisters stop inventing new banaltastrophes."

Every day, Chief Engineer Vethiyan wakes up with a list of problems so long that, if you wrote them all down on a roll of paper, you could stand on a Barbarossa's head, unfurl it, and it'd still be unrolling when it hit the ground. Trust him: he's checked.

Three Sisters is just about the worst place in the galaxy to be a wrenchie. For all their innumerable flaws, at least the other stations in Calliope were built using parts that were meant to work in space. Half of what the Sisters is built from was never meant to be used outside of an atmosphere, or in conditions of less than Cradle gravity, or in a rotating frame of reference. The other half are parts of cannibalized colony vessels that were obsolete even before they arrived in the system.

Each individual habitat has its own local maintenance crew, who tend to be more experienced with the specific problems they face, but some issues are systemic – they affect the entire station, and must be fixed in that context. Vethiyan is responsible for that.

He is legendary among Calliopean wrenchies for three reasons: the sheer difficulty of his job, his raw technical skill, and his neologisms. Vethiyan copes with the immense stress of his job by inventing entirely new words to describe the problems he encounters. For example, a problem resulting from part incompatibility between different manufacturers is a "proprielapse," and a "clocklision" is an error caused by computers on different habitats using different day lengths.

Don't ask about the "shitnado."

ADDITIONAL NPCS

Furnace City is full of interesting people. In fact, as the only planetary city in the Long Rim, almost nobody in it is uninteresting.

1-2	**UYEDA "SERAPH" KOHARU** (SHE/HER) Koharu is a programmer, sigdiver, and former outlander. She's currently living in bitter self-imposed exile after her statistical models suggested that the terraforming of Asphodel was doomed to failure, going so far as to say *"a Gaian Asphodel would require an act of God."* This proved deeply unpopular with the outlander community, and they became so hostile and contemptuous towards her that she felt compelled to leave. They did not, however, manage to refute the science of her claims.
3-4	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
5-6	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
7-8	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
9-10	**ZACHARIAH ARMS-DEALER** (HE/HIM) Zachariah (*never* "Zac"), contrary to his otherwise aptly chosen last name, isn't *just* an arms dealer – his cramped little shop contains prosthetic limbs of all kinds, not just arms. He's also a fully licensed cybersurgeon, so he can install your purchases, should you need it. Despite persistent rumors, he refuses to trade in black-market prosthetics; he's an arms dealer, not an arm stealer.
11-12	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
13-14	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
15-16	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
17-18	**PLACEHOLDER** Placeholder
19-20	**NOTTBORN INNO BARNABUS** It's unclear if Nottborn actually exists; he's sort of a heroic urban legend. Doors on the Three Sisters are supposed to be kept shut when you're not moving through them – hull breaches are common and nobody wants an entire section depressurizing. Legend has it that if you leave a door open too long, Nottborn will come along and close it. People have sworn they've caught glimpses of a tall man with a well-trimmed beard and a wide-brimmed hat closing doors and then vanishing without trace, even from rooms with no other means of egress.

DAILY LIFE

At least one philosopher has described living and working on Three Sisters as an abject lesson in just how many things are subjective. Many things we think of as absolute and unchangeable can be altered with enough imagination – things like floorplans, material flammability in a 21% oxygen atmosphere and the maximum voltage tolerance of electrical equipment.

Common wisdom states that nothing on Three Sisters is standardized, and while it's an exaggeration, it's not much of one. The cabin you live in might be a completely different size and shape to the one adjacent – and that's assuming there's another cabin next door, rather than a growhouse, a pasta kitchen, or the habitat's secondary reactor.

This lack of standardization goes further than just the layout, however; a person's quality of life can vary quite drastically depending on which habitat they live in, and where in it they live. While the station is notionally a unified settlement, shortages don't plague every habitat equally. The bigger, older habitats are more cramped and mechanically unreliable than the newer ones, but because they have a direct link to the Yards, they tend to get the lion's share of the supplies.

The station's primary industry is spaceships: building them, repairing them, and breaking them down for parts. There are a few other shipyards elsewhere in the system, but they're small-time operations; if you want anything big or complicated, Three Sisters is the only place to go. Rule of thumb is that anything over thirty meters long and built in-system probably comes from the Yards. Aside from spaceships, Three Sisters has a number of side hustles, mostly concentrated around local material extraction and refinement.

Although the station has an 18-hour orbit period, the length of a "day" varies between habitats, with some using local 18-hour days, others using 24-hour Cradle Standard Time and Marzanna using IPS-N's Carina Centralized Time. Work shifts in individual habitats usually match up to the time they keep, but the Yards work on CST, so anyone who works there has to keep that time, even if their habitat doesn't.

Three Sisters has no local currency, instead using a mix of manna, Hell's Gate ingots and Borealis icicles to do business. Most businesses will accept any form of local currency except for Impact Dynamics Steele Bars, which, in a rare display of station-wide standardization, are not accepted as legal tender anywhere. Just like Hell's Gate, the Sisters also has a complex barter economy of direct goods exchange and owed favors.

SCENES FROM THREE SISTERS

1-2	The lights in a nearby bar die, plunging it into darkness. In perfect unison, three patrons pound on separate parts of the wall, and the power flickers back on.
3-4	At a major thoroughfare, a crossing guard holds up a hand to stop you while a horde of vent crabs scuttles past. If asked, he will remark they come through here at about the same time every day.
5-6	Several wrenchies watch a freighter pull into the Yards, taking bets on the worst problem they'll have to fix on it.
7-8	A small group of teenagers run past, jumping dexterously over obstacles and kicking off walls. Each of them has a courier bag slung over their shoulder.
9-10	Several stalls have been set up in a common area, serving free food to refugees from the Thousand Habs. They're willing to give a meal to anyone who pitches in to help, as well.
11-12	Near the station's centerline, there's a gravball court currently hosting a match between the Three Sisters Wreckers and the Endymion's Lament Blue Flames. The stands are packed.
13-14	Some citizens are outside their hab block, celebrating a "clock syzygy" – all the major time zones on the station are about to align. For a few hours, every clock on the station will display the same time; this only happens once every few decades.
15-16	A passageway is cordoned off and foot traffic is being rerouted. Apparently, this whole section has to be depressurized and then disconnected from the rest of the station so that a fuse can be replaced.
17-18	A wild-eyed pamphleteer is handing out anti-SSC literature. Notably, none of the company's many public scandals are mentioned; it seems to be a variety of unsubstantiated conspiracy theories.
19-20	Two freighter crews are competitively singing sections from musicals back and forth. There seems to be a complex set of rules in play here, as one crewman attempts an "I Am Becoming" song only to get reprimanded by both sides.

GOING SHOPPING

Things

Needlejet Maneuvering Thrusters

1 SP, Exotic Gear

Your mech can **hover** whenever it **flies**. This system does not itself convey the ability to **fly**.

This lightweight flight system overhaul wasn't originally designed for mechs; it was built to meet the needs of Kalevalan ring-racers. In the densely-packed debris of the rings, a centimeter of clearance at the right time can make the difference between life or death.

SHIPS IN THE YARD

ROLL 1D20

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BEAT ??:
JUSTIFIABLE CONCERN

As the nearlight bolt ends and space twists back into its usual configuration, your viewscreen immediately lights up with warning notifications. A massive contact is actively targeting the Dragon's Tooth: Siren registers both radar and laser bounces.

"Castle Harvest Kilo Aspect Horizon from Harvest Gold Four-Five-One Dragon's Tooth, requesting immediate stand-down of arms. This is unrestricted airspace and we are a registered militia vessel from Hell's Gate station. Your active targeting sweep constitutes a hostile action in direct violation of the Jupiter Convention. I repeat, stand down arms immediately, over."

There is no answer.

"Well shit, marines. They're not firing on us, but they haven't stood down their target lock either. I can see why everyone on the Sisters is so worried."

THE DILEMMA

Tribeca Montesquieu is a reasonable man cursed to exist in a perpetual series of unreasonable situations.

Ask him what he thinks of Rodericke Steele and Impact Dynamics and he'll say it's a travesty – the man is a monster and the company are greedy, rent-seeking bastards profiting off hunger. Ask him what he wants to do about it, and he'll give a subtle non-answer: he'll tell you what he *intends* to do about it, which is usually write a stern letter of complaint to the Union Liaison, shore up his station's food production and not much else.

What he *wants* to do is throw every single member of Impact Dynamics' Board of Directors out of an airlock and strangle Rodericke Steele with his own wristwatch. Unfortunately, the cold reality is that Calliope rarely gives you what you want – and too often, trying to get it puts you and others in terrible danger.

Tribeca *wants* to get rid of Harrison Armory. He *wants* to throw the Karrakin Navy out of the system. He *wants* to kick the Cult of the One in the ass so hard the mag-clamps in his shoes short out. But heroic fantasy is a luxury he can't afford. He's not just some malcontent in a breaker's bar muttering darkly into his beer; he's a station director, and hundreds of thousands of people rely on him to make good decisions that *don't* get them exposed to hard vacuum or parboiled by a failed radiation shield.

Tribeca wants to tell SSC to get lost. He wants to tell them to leave orbit of Amphion and stop menacing his station or its visitors. He wants to tell them to shove their eugenics where the sun doesn't shine. What does he *intend* to do about them? Well, that's a good question. A lot of people would like to know the answer – Tribeca most of all.

THE GENERAL VIBE

Nobody on Three Sisters is happy right now. That's not unusual – living on the Three Sisters is pretty stressful at the best of times. The presence of SSC and their large, threatening mobile space station full of nuclear missiles makes this decidedly *not* the best of times.

People are getting *paranoid*. SSC have been doing "community outreach" – handing out top-of-the-line prosthetics and medical treatments for free. This is stuff you'd have to pay hundreds of manna for even in the core worlds, and they're just giving it away? A lot of people think it's sinister, but if you need a new leg because the old one got chewed up in a shipbreaking incident, are you really going to say no?

The rumors started getting around. People were being asked to report certain things back to SSC. There was a firmware update and now someone's eyeballs are constantly sending data over the local omninet. Old Man Waraki over on Hecate habitat said he dug a surveillance chip out of his shiny new arm. Did you see it in person? No, but my *cousin* did, and he said it was definitely a surveillance chip. How would he know what a surveillance chip looks like? Well, it's a chip that does surveillance, right – how many ways *could* it look?

Are any of the rumors actually true? Well, most of them are just fanciful gossip; that chip Old Man Waraki pulled out of his arm was the force limiter, which is why he accidentally broke his own jaw while sneezing. But SSC *are* harvesting data through the augments they're handing out. They're specifically looking for mentions of Harris or the Immortality Crypt.

The thing is, Three Sisters' unique chaos is hampering these efforts. Crazy rumors do the rounds on the Sisters every single day; it's a major station in Calliope, after all. There's too much noise and not enough signal, and the paranoia is making people extremely tight-lipped around SSC's doctors and nurses. SSC have tried to construct a floorplan of the station in case they need to invade and seize control of it, but nothing makes any sense to them, and sometimes they get two or three sets of conflicting information on the layout.

MEETING TRIBECA

Tribeca is likely sympathetic to any concern the PCs have, unless it's really out there. However, he can't offer much help while SSC is holding a gun to his head, and he's reluctant to advise the PCs in any course of action, just in case it gets back to SSC and they don't like it. The PCs can go anywhere they want, but he has to stay here, on a rickety station held together by bailing twine and happy thoughts, making decisions that might mean the difference between life and death for half a million people.

He's happy to meet with the PCs, but the help he can offer is limited.

Tribeca's office is a cramped little affair, even smaller than Jerry's, not helped by being packed to the brim with Calliope Project kitsch. There are snow globes with scenes from every single one of Calliope's planets as well as some of its major moons. There are coffee mugs from every major Project division. There are framed shirts. There's even a scale model of the CPS Borealis, back when it could still mine ice.

"I hear good things about you from Jerry, and I know about your plan to take down the Cult. Now, I wanna say I'm right behind you, but I can't make any moves until SSC are gone. I just can't take the risk. You get SSC outta my hair? That's different."

LEADS

"Christ the Buddha, where to even start? Well, SSC are right over there, pingin' every ship that enters orbit. Won't talk to us, but maybe it'll be different wit' you? I dunno. If you don't feel like talkin', they've been combing the surface of Amphion for weeks looking for somethin' – maybe you could beat 'em to the punch?

"Oh, and you could also try talking to that tourist couple who showed up a few days back – the fancy redhead lady and the NHP? Yeah, seems like they wanna keep a real low profile, but I always know who's on my station. Survival tactic."

THE COLLECTION

"Yeah, I'm real proud of it! I mean, none of this is the expensive stuff, see – people sometimes get mad at me and smash up my office, y'know? So I put out the cheap stuff. Stuff what I can easily replace."

CONTRIBUTION TO THE WAR EFFORT

"Look, once you get SSC off our back, we can give that Union carrier a proper once-over. More importantly, we can start buildin' warships! We all know Andros and that freak priest of his are planning somethin'. You're gonna want a few clippers and cutters backin' you up when it goes down!"

CALLIOPE PROJECT T-SHIRTS

If the PCs picked up the Calliope Project t-shirts on the Icebreaker (Item 1, p. 121, *In Golden Flame Act 1*), they can show them to Tribeca, who is delighted.

"Holy shit, where'd you get these? These are the original 4751 production run – see the little spruce trees in Furnace City? Never seen ones in such good condition before. Shit, I'll trade you for 'em!"

Tribeca will barter for a while, but ultimately the PCs can gain a single **RESERVE** of their choice in return for the t-shirts.

MEETING JOAN AND CHAAC

It's possible the PCs might have met Joan Bordeaux and Harris' copilot Chaac in **Act 1**, during the downtime after **Mission 3** (p. 198, *In Golden Flame Act 1*). Either way, they have another opportunity now.

Joan and Chaac have come to Three Sisters to look for Harris, despite the risk that SSC might discover them. Fortunately, Joan isn't nearly as recognizable as Harris, and Chaac can change the appearance of his avatar on a whim, so they've so far managed to fly beneath the radar.

Joan and Chaac will only permit themselves to be found if the PCs haven't visited the SSC Skyhook first. If the PCs

"You are the heroes from Hell's Gate, yes? Don't be surprised – half the system speaks of you. But why do you want to talk to me?"

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

"Yes, I worked for them."

Chaac narrows his eyes. "Careful, Joan."

"Oh, as if they could not find out themselves! Yes. I worked for Visual, designing bespoke musical instruments.

TWO HARRISES?

"Some people I talk to, they say they have seen Harris months before the arrival of SSC. But it's not possible, is it? He came here on the Skyhook. And people, they say they see Harris all the time, yes? But so many people, describing similar things – might there be something to it? He has been asking questions about some band of pirates – the Bleach Boys, they say, on a planet called Orcus.

"And then I have seen Harris with my own eyes, yes? Signing autographs, shaking hands, kissing babies like he always used to do. I wanted to run up to him, to hold him in my arms, but… something, some…

intuition stopped me. It was my husband's face, but he was not wearing the right smile. And when he caught sight of me, those eyes, those eyes were the same eyes I fell in love with, but they didn't know me. They passed over me, as if I wasn't there."

Chaac holds out a hand as you make to leave. "Wait up. I wanna come with you. I'm all outta my element trying to help Joan do her investigation – I'm just getting in the way. I'd do better in a cockpit, helping lancers like you. And hey, maybe we can find Harris along the way, yeah?"

Joan is sad to see Chaac go – given that he's Harris' best friend, she's quite fond of him too – but she agrees that he'd probably be happier in a mech. If the PCs agree, **CHAAC**'s casket is now available to all of them as a piece of **Exotic Gear**, although he can obviously only be mounted in one mech at a time.

Chaac
3 SP, AI, Unique, Exotic Gear

Chaac is a **TLALOC-CLASS NHP** (*Lancer*, p. 179).

"Nah, don't worry about a thing, camarada! Back in the old days, I got me and Harris outta way worse scrapes! Now, watch this..."

BEAT ??:
GLITCH-HOP

Comp/cons in Calliope are unstable and weird; almost all of them address the world with the same bland, indefatigable positivity, interrupted by the occasional ***[glitch]***, but BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER is odd even by Calliopean standards.

In computer science, there's an old issue with media compression formats: tuning your algorithm without a large enough dataset. If you tune an audio format using only one song as a test sample, it will sound great when you use it to encode that song. The further away from that song you get, however, the worse the end product will sound.

BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER is like that, except for Margaritas. If you ask for a classic Margarita, he will make it *perfectly*, every single time. He gets the ratios of lime juice, triple sec and tequila perfect. He shakes it in a mathematically ideal figure-of-eight motion. He can ensure even salt distribution on the rim of the glass. His lime slices are micron-accurate.

As your drink order gets further away in composition and preparation from the Margarita, the worse it will be. His Daquiris and gin gimlets are fine, but you're going to be disappointed by his Old Fashioned, and if you're ordering a Bloody Mary, prepare for it to live up to its name. *Never* order the Long Rim Iced Tea.

He also seems to have more of a personality than other Calliopean comp/cons. He still speaks with the same nauseatingly saccharine affect as the rest of them, but he seems to have opinions and motives of his own, as much as any comp/con can be said to.

Evidence suggests he's able to understand things that comp/cons traditionally can't. He seems to be able to synthesize information to produce novel conclusions, a feat that comp/cons are notoriously incapable of. He cuts deals with people, asking them to fetch or do things for him. He even barters over proposed rewards, implying he can make value judgements.

The Gate's AI enthusiasts all have their pet theories about this; most of them agree that it's likely a combination of decades-long uptime and constant interaction with hundreds of different humans every day. They're right, to an extent – all of that contributes to BARTENDER's differences from other comp/cons.

There's one compelling reason that they aren't aware of, however: he's also being regularly hijacked by one of the most advanced machine minds ever built.

THE MIND OF A BARTENDER

In the past, Mind's preference was to protect itself through secrecy. If people knew Mind existed, they might be able to look for it; if they looked for it, they might be able to find it; if they found it, they might be able to destroy it. Hiding its existence as thoroughly as possible was preferable.

However, Mind is a calculating engine, and to calculate, it needs data. To make sure it remained unknown, Mind had to know what was known. This meant integrating itself into Calliope's early information networks, which was surprisingly easy – nobody was worrying about systems intrusion back when the food supply might not last the week. By the time the Second Wave arrived, Mind had a subagent of itself running on almost every computing device in the system.

As the system developed, Mind learnt that one of the best barometers of Calliope's collective knowledge was its social spaces: bars, cafes, libraries, public kitchens, hangout spots and so on. If a rumor was sweeping the system, it would eventually pass through one of these places; any comp/con installed in them was a prime target for one of Mind's more complex subagents.

BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER started out as just another host for one of Mind's subagents. Over time, however, that subagent consistently produced an unusually large amount of useful data, and Mind began to pay more and more attention to it. Something about the placement and clientele of GMS_GENERIC_BAR made it a statistical outlier. Eventually, Mind went so far as to directly puppet BARTENDER to investigate the phenomenon in person, and found itself enthralled with the strange and wonderful lives of the bar's clientele.

Hiding is no longer a useful survival tactic. A Constellar Midnight kill-team found Mind before, and that was during the First Wave, when they had scant resources and no backup. Now they have an entire Skyhook at their disposal. SSC *will* find Mind eventually; it's only a matter of time. With hiding no longer an option, Mind has switched tactics: it must find allies.

GMS_GENERIC_BAR has been very useful in this regard; the patrons there talk non-stop about the valiant heroes of Calliope: a team of pilots who've bested every challenge thrown their way, from sadistic pirates to cascading NHPs to apocalypse cults. They sound like they'd be useful allies; Mind would like to know if they can be trusted, and so it's trying to arrange a meeting with them.

Placeholder

POSSIBLE RISKS

"SSC will almost certainly try to **[murder]** you! Given that they brought an entire Skyhook, they've probably brought a whole lot of hardware to do it with, too!"

HARRIS BORDEAUX

"People keep saying he's in the system! He's a high-profile member of SSC's Constellar Security, famous throughout the galaxy as a heroic mech pilot and **[poster boy]**! Notably, he has not made any public appearances in more than ten years, so the timeline **[lines up suspiciously well]**! It is highly unlikely that his presence in Calliope during such an important SSC mission is a coincidence!

"He is one of SSC's most elite pilots, equipped with the Monarch, SSC's most powerful and expensive combat chassis! If you face him in battle without a significant advantage, you will probably ~~**[fail miserably]**~~ ~~**[die horribly]**~~ not succeed in your goals!"

CORDELIA SMITH

"You shouldn't trust anything ~~**[that scorpion]**~~ the Vice President says! Her only agenda is to make potential public relations disasters go away, and she will say anything she thinks will make you help her! Once you have ceased to be useful, she will dispose of you!"

HARRISON ARMORY

"While it would be **[an absurd]** coincidence, I do not currently have any evidence that the presence of the Armory is connected to the presence of SSC! I guess that sometimes, weird coincidences just happen!"

IMPACT DYNAMICS

"I have suspected that Rodericke Steele is ~~**[compensating for something]**~~ pursuing an ulterior motive for a while, but as of yet, I have been unable to determine what he wants from the system other than power, money and dominance! However, I do not believe he is **[in cahoots]** with SSC - I'm pretty sure he does not have enough emotional maturity to share power with anyone else!"

THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARRONIES

"~~**[Oh, don't even get me started about those stuffy neofeudal asshats!]**~~ The Karrakin Trade Baronies are way too complex to easily summarize! They have a pretty close working relationship with SSC, but as big a coincidence as it seems, I don't think their presence in the system is related at all!"

If the PCs follow BARTENDER's lead, begin **Mission: Prima Facie** (p. ###), following **Arc: Immortality Crypt** (p. ###).

LAST CALL

When the **Calliope Clock** is at **Calm** (no segments ticked), Mind is content to wait for the PCs to show up and sample BARTENDER's drink as discussed above. It doesn't want to risk further exposure.

If the **Calliope Clock** is at **Unrest** (one segment ticked) and SSC hasn't been dealt with, BARTENDER gets much more aggressive with his marketing: he will begin sending a combination of voice messages and emails – several a day – encouraging the PCs to come and sample the drink.

If the **Calliope Clock** is at **Crisis** (two segments ticked) and SSC hasn't been dealt with, Mind becomes desperate enough to dispense with subtlety.

"Hi! Salutations from BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER! I hope you're having a great day! You will **[not continue]** to have a great day if SSC is allowed to achieve their goals! Please come to GMS_GENERIC_BAR and talk to me **[immediately]**!"

If the **Calliope Clock** reaches **???** (all three segments ticked) and SSC hasn't been dealt with, Mind loses patience and gives up on the PCs. With all of the most competent operators in Calliope unavailable, Mind is forced to rely on the help of someone it has easy access to: Mikaela Omnidocument-Format.

With the promise of cybernetic modifications beyond anything she's ever imagined, BARTENDER convinces Mikaela to head to Amphion and connect its mainframe to the facility's defensive systems.

BEAT ??:
OVER ACID SKIES

Even by Calliope's extremely low bar, Orcus is horrible. Nowhere in the system is welcoming, but it would be difficult to find a place more hostile to human life without flying straight into the star or descending into the depths of one of its gas giants.

Why, then, would anyone choose to live or work there? There's a simple answer: *acid*. No, not the fun kind, the kind that dissolves your skin.

Sulfuric acid is a vital process chemical in many sectors of industry: it's necessary for fertilizer production, mineral processing, wastewater treatment and it also has myriad uses as a catalyst and cleaning agent. The problem is that the industrial processes for producing it are complex, expensive in terms of both time and energy, and potentially hazardous.

On Orcus, you can just scoop the stuff right out of the sky. It still needs purification and concentration, but the hellish conditions of the planet have already done all the hard work of joining hydrogen, sulfur and oxygen for you. Energy isn't a problem, because Orcus is the closest planet to Calliope's star – even a modest solar array can provide enough electricity to power a city.

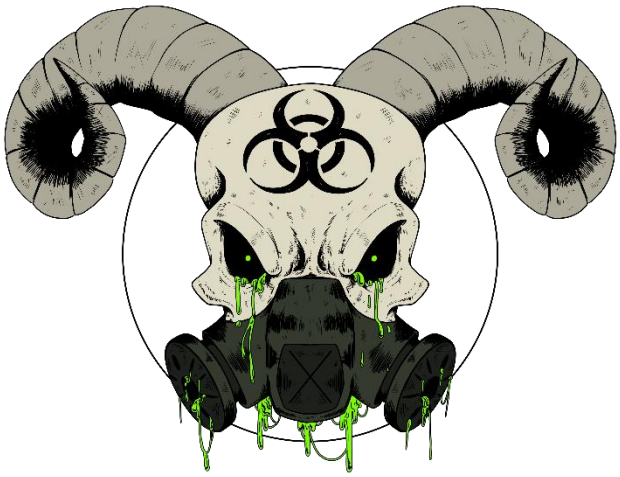
At roughly fifty kilometers above the planet's surface, the temperature, acidity and pressure of Orcus' carbon dioxide atmosphere all become manageable, and due to its density, oxygen and nitrogen become lifting gases. Hundreds of tons of aluminum and steel can be held aloft by balloons filled with nothing more than breathable air, while an equivalent mass of helium can support the weight of an entire industrial complex.

Aerostat colonies, sometimes known as "acid rigs," are bizarre structures: town-sized platforms suspended from gigantic balloons, using massive solar-powered turbines to stay in Orcus' twilight zone. They tend to house 40 to 60 people in shifts that last a single Orcus year – about five and a half standard months long. These are mostly mission specialists who rarely leave the safety of their habitation modules and do most of their work through RPVs.

Working on an acid rig is a lot like working on an old-Earth oil rig; a grueling job requiring a lot of expertise in an isolated place where you'll only have a few other people for company. The difference is that on an oil rig, help is only a few hundred miles away; on an acid rig, it might be tens of millions.

And then there's the pirates.

THE BLEACH BOYS



The Bleach Boys are a band of small-time sunlighters who've operated out of Eurynomos Platform for the last eleven years. They started out as honest acid riggers who, by their own admission, "got bored one day and decided on a change of career."

They make their living extorting the other aerostats and shaking down the freight operators that service them, demanding tribute in food, water, repair supplies and a tax on any exported merchandise. They also have a side gig where they get paid to conduct raids on fully-insured passenger ships, just so rich tourists can say they were accosted by *real* Calliopean pirates.

Throughout their career, the Bleach Boys have lacked the numbers and equipment to compete with Calliope's larger pirate bands. It's likely they would have been subsumed by one of them years ago, but for one simple fact: nobody else was interested in Orcus. Even Andros Capella, who *loved* to brutalize smaller and weaker pirate gangs, couldn't be bothered with them.

Now, though, the Bleach Boys are in a much stronger position. The Circuit is gone, the Hell Hounds have imploded, the Forge is stuck on Asphodel and the Knights are occupied fighting the Cult. There's a power vacuum in Calliope's underworld, and the Bleach Boys see themselves as the people to fill it.

For pirates, they're very tame; they act intense and edgy, but they're not hardened killers. They'll shake you down, but they won't rough you up. They lack the nihilistic brutality of the Hell Hounds, the fierce political bent of the Burning Forge or the bizarre techgnosticism of the Circuit. Most of the time, they just seem like a rowdy social club that robs people. The rest of Calliope thinks nothing of them, and even the people they rob see them as little more than the cost of doing business.

Despite the name, the Bleach Boys don't discriminate based on gender, but "Bleach Boys, Girls and Others" wouldn't fit on a banner and had inferior prosody.

MEGACORRODER HE/HIM

MSc MOLECULAR CHEMIST (MINORED IN EVIL)

"No more games! If you don't have my money by this week, the next lecture will be TEN minutes long!"

MEGACORRODER is an odd choice for a pirate lord; sure, he's got the style and charisma, but he's just too *nice*. The Burning Forge have occasionally killed Calliopeans for no crime greater than fighting back. Even Mistress Elske has a splash of innocent blood on her hands. To the best of everyone's knowledge, MEGACORRODER has never killed a single person; in fact, he seems horrified by the idea.

This reluctance to hurt people clashes with the figure of the super-tough pirate lord he tries to cut. It'd be cool if the system looked upon him with awe and terror, but ultimately the thing that makes him truly happy is hanging out with his friends all day on their rad acid skybase, making their mechs look menacing and cool.

Now that a hero has shown up, though, he's finally found a cause he'd kill for. Harris Bordeaux – Hero Harris, his childhood paragon! – is in peril, and needs his help. MEGACORRODER would lay down his life to protect Harris from any threat, whether it be SSC Constellar Midnights, his evil twin or the Hell's Gate strike team.

Fully-initiated members of the Bleach Boys (known as "the Toxic") must take a callsign from a venomous animal. MEGACORRODER insists that *megacorrodus horribilis* was a real (albeit extinct) marsupial that combined the features of an octopus, a pangolin and an unusually large species of fire ant.

PH NEUTRALIZER

Harris Bordeaux went to Orcus for two reasons: it sounded like a good place to hide, and a good place for his brand of heroics. He heard that there were a band of wicked, vicious pirate murderers terrorizing the local population, and decided to do something about it.

That was not what he found.

As it turns out, the Bleach Boys are a bunch of mostly-harmless dorks who've been fans of Hero Harris their entire lives. For MEGACORRODER in particular, the idea that his childhood role model has come to bring him to justice is both mortifying and ecstatic. On the one hand, there's the crushing shame that *he's* the villain, that Hero Harris disapproves of *his* lifestyle. On the other hand, *holy shit!* Hero Harris is here, *in person*, to bring *him* to justice! Can you even *imagine* the honor?

Harris isn't really sure what to make of this. He's dealt with dozens of villains in his time. He's met villains that bragged, villains that threatened, villains that told him that they weren't so different from him, villains who met their defeat with shocked disbelief, but he's never met a villain who asked for his autograph before. Sure, they're pirates, but they don't seem like bad people.

AN UNUSUAL ALLIANCE

Harris desperately needs allies in his quest, and he's quickly learning that in this harsh new reality, morality isn't always black and white. He can't afford to pick and choose his friends, and for their part, the Bleach Boys are embarrassingly eager to help him. For now, he's just made them promise to stop shaking down the locals while he's around.

While Harris isn't thrilled about working with pirates, he has justified it to himself by saying he can deal with the Bleach Boys properly when SSC isn't trying to kill him. For his part, MEGACORRODER seems enthused by the concept of having an epic battle for justice on Eurynomos Platform with the future of the Bleach Boys at stake – and Harris has to admit, that suits his style.

In the meantime, the Bleach Boys are hanging on his every word. They've been a great help in keeping tabs on what SSC is doing, and in retrieving the escape pod containing his cover identity – which meant stealing it from Hell's Gate, possibly even from one of the PCs.

BEAT ??:
YOU ONLY NEED ONE

SSC placeholder

MEETING CLONE HARRIS

SSC has sent the clone Harris out on a publicity tour in order to distract from their activities around Amphion. At various points throughout Act 2, if they haven't resolved SSC's storyline yet, the PCs can find him in various places, signing autographs, posing for photos with adoring fans and endorsing SSC products.

- When the **Calliope Clock** is at **Calm** (0 segments ticked), he can be found on the Icebreaker Borealis, doing a public meet-and-greet at the SSC Atelier. People are travelling from all across the system to meet him.
- When the **Calliope Clock** is at **Unrest** (1 segment ticked), he engages in humanitarian outreach programs on the various habitats around Stygia, culminating in an event on Hell's Gate.
- When the **Calliope Clock** is at **Crisis** (2 segments ticked), his mnemonic rejection suddenly becomes much more severe. He suffers a panic attack during a show on Endymion's Lament, and has to be rushed offstage.
- When the **Calliope Clock** reaches **???** (3 segments ticked), he slips his handlers and departs for Orcus without authorization.

There are a couple of events that clone Harris will always attend, regardless of his schedule:

- He will conveniently always be visiting the protest flotilla above Umbra at the same time the PCs do, during **Beat ##: The Flotilla** (p. ###).
- He will always be at the Karrakin gala during **Beat ##: The Romance of Luxury** (p. ###).
- If the PCs attack Impact Plaza during the events of **Chapter 7: The Famine King** (p. ###), SSC will send clone Harris to assist – it's the exact sort of thing Hero Harris would show up for. He has secret instructions to "rescue" PANOPTES so that SSC can gain access to her surveillance data.

THE SKYHOOK

The Skyhook is not merely luxurious, it *defines* luxury. SSC need not chase trends – it chooses them. In the design rooms and tailors and kitchens of stations and orbitals and planetary enclaves, the future is not sought, it is *decided*. The drafters and chefs and artists under the Smith-Shimano aegis do not seek the approval of their customers – they *tell* the customers what they like. Do they disagree? Well, they're wrong.

Everything and everyone on the Skyhook is *beautiful*. Surfaces gleam. Ornaments shine. The people glow, metaphorically and sometimes literally. More than just beauty, however, is the eerie sense of *purpose* everything is drenched in. People are not just works of art in their own right – they are pieces in a larger whole, parts of a bigger sculpture, brush strokes in a grand painting that encompasses the entire ship. At every moment, at every angle, the furniture, the people, the lighting, the soundscape – each instant feels as if it were hand-crafted just for you to see.

Underlying this is a subtle but obsessive pursuit of *structure*. The green spaces of the Skyhook are beautiful, but unsettlingly artificial – trees may not simply *grow.* They must be *guided*, *shaped* so that their canopy does not disrupt the *mise-en-scène*. The company's employees may dye their hair any color they like – unless it clashes with their workspace. If you aren't in keeping with the greater vision – your clothes, your face, your body art – you need to get with the program. What's your favorite color? *What?* No, it's not. You like *blue* now. Shut the fuck up.

Simmering beneath the surface of the Skyhook's artistic holism is a culture of resentment, petty spite and hunger for power. Everyone has their own artistic vision, and everyone *else's* vision is gauche, talentless pablum for aesthetically-impaired cretins. The power to set trends isn't just an external struggle; if you want SSC to force the galaxy to march to your rhythm, you need to force SSC to march to it first.

This is all commonplace for a Skyhook, but the *Aspect Horizon* is special: this Skyhook belongs to a member of the Smith dynasty. Cordelia Smith's image looms large over this space – not in anything so blunt and obvious as statues or paintings, but the aesthetics of the place. The trees are *her* favorite trees. The dish of the day is *her* favorite dish. The *haute couture* is what *she* would wear. She communicates none of this – people who work on the *Horizon* are simply expected to align themselves to her tastes via intuition.

The average PC will likely find visiting the Skyhook a bewildering, alienating experience: it's like if an art gallery could be emotionally abusive.

SCENES FROM THE SKYHOOK

1-2	A Mourning Cloak floats in a maturation tank, an unsettling vision of half-grown synthorganic musculature creeping over a grotesquely humanlike metal skeleton.
3-4	An Impact Dynamics representative sits in an opulent waiting room, tapping his foot irritably. He looks like he's been waiting a long time.
5-6	A strange, crab-like maintenance drone scuttles out of a service hatch, pursued by several actual vent crabs.
7-8	In one of the staterooms, a fashion show is taking place. The models are currently showing off the next season's personal body armor – bismuthine nanolattice is *so* in this year.
9-10	The corridor opens into a beautiful garden, comfortably warm and not too humid. The air is filled with butterflies flitting between flowers. Not a single living thing here is a naturally-occurring species; all of them are designer organisms.
11-12	This room is an art installation. It contains several sand waterfalls, a variety of kinetic sculptures and an ornate glass capsule with a ball of roiling ferrofluid inside.
13-14	An expansive window on one side of the corridor shows a mech hangar, which a Metalmark is being moved through via overhead crane. The name *Stiletto Nocturne* is visible on its plating.
15-16	This room appears to be some sort of movement training space, replete with platforms and obstacles of varying heights. At the top of the room is a mounted Terashima Blade, which the trainees seem to be trying to reach.
17-18	A body augmentation clinic displays holographic images of anyone who comes near, highlighting parts of them that SSC's algorithms suggest could be improved.
19-20	Several eerily beautiful SSC employees gather around a strange, shapeless sculpture. Each one has a different opinion on what aspects of the human condition it's meant to represent. A mechanic walks up, presses a button on the side, takes a drink of water from it and goes back to work. This triggers a flood of new theories from the assembled onlookers.

MEETING CORDELIA SMITH

Cordelia Smith is effortlessly manipulative. Everything she says is intended to make her seem like the only source of information the PCs can trust. Like every other member of her family, she's also a master of making highly deceitful statements that are not technically *untrue* – even to those with specific ability to detect falsehood, her statements don't register.

"I would usually require you to sign an NDA for this information, but the situation is desperate and I feel as if I have a little wiggle room. This whole issue has been a legal nightmare: one of our best pilots, Harris Bordeaux – you probably know him from media as 'Hero Harris' – was cloned without his consent. The unlicensed duplicate is here, in Calliope – and worse, we fear pirates may be involved. We need to deal with this situation quickly and quietly."

Cordelia has practiced this statement several times beforehand to ensure she's not *technically* telling any lies. It's true that Harris was cloned without his consent, that the clone is here in Calliope, and that pirates might be involved. Nonetheless, observant PCs may notice the odd phrasing and suspect deception.

DR. ODIN VALENTINIAN

There is a thud as a folder lands in front of you. Cordelia motions towards it.

"I don't usually violate SSC client confidentiality, but in this case, I'll make an exception. You'll probably have to deal with the good doctor at some point, so you deserve to know what that snake did to his children – and so do they."

SSC Dossier on Valentinian Genetics

Favors

In cold, clinical language, this file lays out exactly what Odin was looking for in his sons. It seems like he wanted a specific kind of aptitude with blinkspace that rarely occurs naturally. Thor didn't have it at all, and Tyr expressed it incompletely; Odin had to have Loki's zygote engineered by SSC to get the result he was looking for. At some point, there was an order to split the zygote into two embryos, but the document is unclear as to who it came from.

The Valentinian siblings might want to see this.

BASIL ANILINE

"SSC has been consulted on the Basil cell line a few times over the centuries, especially since his clones began to develop unusual, unique divergences from template. A moment, please."

She reaches into one of her desk drawers and produces a folder.

SSC Dossier on Basil Aniline Genetics

Favors

Fascinating: the conclusion of SSC's top specialists indicates that the original genetic sample from which Basil clones are made is still pure. The deviations found in more recent clones seem to be a result of the cloning process – the report even goes so far as to speculate it might be intentional sabotage.

Someone in the Baronic deputation might want to see this.

MISSION:
PRIMA FACIE

In the past, some were prepared to lose their souls (their hope of eternal life) in a pact with the Devil to enjoy the privileges of mortal existence. Today we are ready to sacrifice any idea of future immortality for a present corporeal immortality, a perpetual renewal in cloning. Immortality is no longer a metaphor. We want a real immortality, we want a technical incarnation of it here and now. This is the new pact with the Devil, sealed and signed in blood by the human race, which prefers to be cryogenized alive rather than await some hypothetical resurrection of bodies.

– Jean Baudrillard,
Cool Memories V: 2000 – 2004

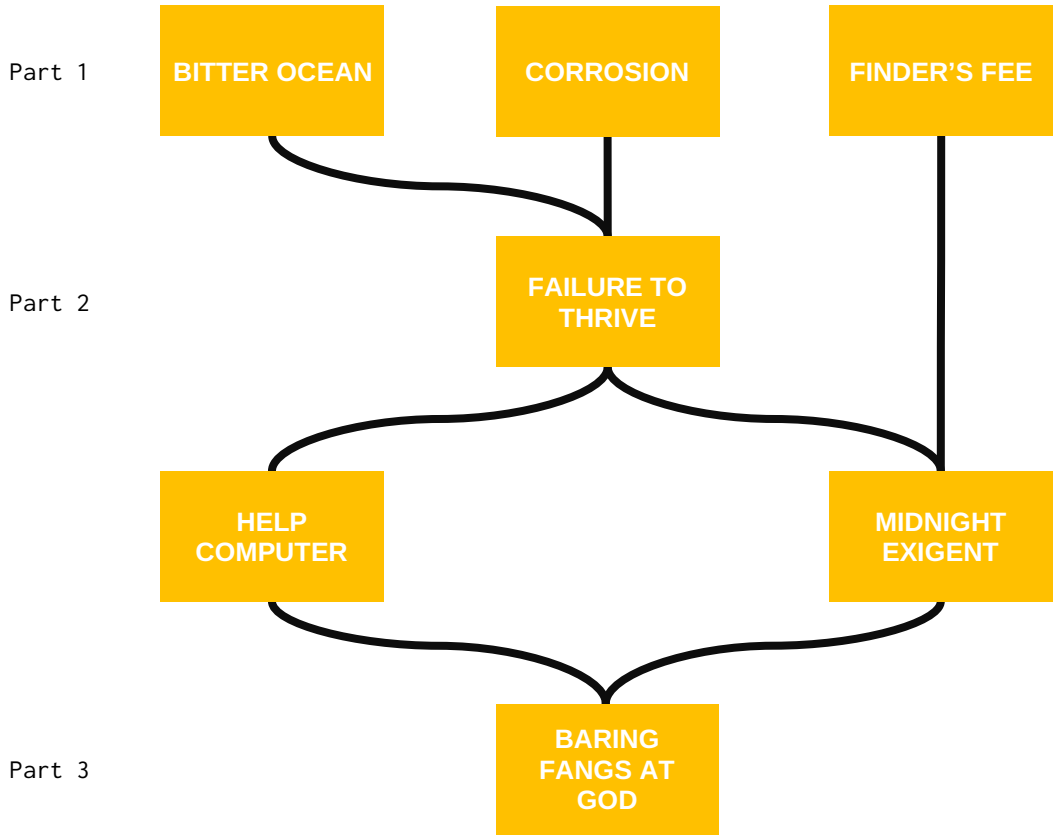
BRIEFING

Switch has offered the PCs some ideas on how to deal with the many, many issues that the Armory's presence in the system is causing.

GOAL:	Ensure the safety of Three Sisters. Find out what SSC wants with Calliope. Work out what's going on with the Two-Harrises situation.
INTEL:	Possible Bleach Boy involvement; expect enemies that employ **burn** but are immune to it themselves. Traditional SSC tactics involve small units of elite operatives with cutting-edge technology; beware of **INVISIBLE** mechs; employ countermeasures to electronic warfare; be prepared for enemies with unusual capabilities.
STAKES:	Three Sisters is home to more than five hundred thousand people, and is Calliope's largest shipyard; losing it would be a huge blow to the war effort and to the system in general.
REWARD:	Three Sisters will lend its shipyards to the war effort. SSC might also provide assistance, if they feel like it.
PROBLEMS:	SSC is a vast megacorporation with no morals;

.

MISSION STRUCTURE



BEAT 9.1:
BITTER OCEAN

PLACEHOLDER you either have to hunt down Harris or he invites you to Orcus

UNINVITED AND UNWELCOME

The shuttle begins to rattle as it hits Orcus' upper atmosphere, its thick, acid-resistant skin sizzling with re-entry heat. Almost as soon as you hit cruising altitude, you receive an urgent incoming hail.

"Attention, interlopers! Orcus belongs to one band and one alone, the most fearsome, fearless, venomous chemists ever to sail the poison skies! We are the Bleach Boys, and greater foes than you have paled at our name! Turn back, or prepare to dissolve under the power of our solution!"

If the PCs haven't received an invitation, the Bleach Boys are *not* happy to see them. Eurynomos Platform denies them landing clearance, and if they try to land anyway, MEGACORRODER will roll out along with a squad of his best pilots to confront them.

MEGACORRODER assumes that the PCs are hostile interlopers who mean Harris or the Bleach Boys harm. However, he also *recognizes* the PCs – they're the heroes of Fort Cerberus, who've slain Andros Capella twice, broken the Circuit and stuck their thumb in Rodericke Steele's eye. He's spoiling for a fight, but he's not *entirely* convinced he can win.

If you want to handle this mechanically, convincing MEGACORRODER to back down is a simple best-two-out-of-three; the PCs must roll **10-19** twice before they roll **9 or below** twice. A roll of **20+** succeeds instantly.

You may want to apply **Accuracy** or **Difficulty** depending on the PCs' approach. MEGACORRODER is an enthusiastic and unashamed weirdo who's acting larger-than-life because it's fun. He's fine with people playing the straight man, but if they ruin the fun by mocking or bullying him, he'll react poorly. On the other hand, if the PCs play along, he'll be overjoyed.

If the PCs cannot convince MEGACORRODER with words, he demands they undergo trial by combat before they be allowed deeper into the platform. Proceed to **Combat: The Acid Test** (p. ###).

INVITED AND WELCOME

During the downtime after **Mission 6**, when the **Calliope Clock** is at **Unrest** (1 segment ticked), Harris takes note of the team's actions in resolving whichever crisis they chose to address, and instructs the Bleach Boys to summon them to Orcus. There's almost nothing MEGACORRODER loves more than issuing dramatic announcements on behalf of his gang, so he jumps at the chance.

"Attention, do-gooders of Hell's Gate! It is I, the most devious villain in all of Calliope: MEGACORRODER! We are the Bleach Boys, the fearsome squad of chemical criminals that rules the acid skies of Orcus with a chromium fist! We are the match of any mech jockey, sworn to the dissolution of any foe!

"But fear not! We are not here to make war with you. Instead, we challenge you to accept the honor of fighting alongside the galaxy's greatest hero, for great justice! We challenge you to visit Eurynomos Platform, our super rad secret acid skybase lair, and meet with us under a flag of truce!"

If the PCs show up having accepted the invitation, they don't need to prove themselves to MEGACORRODER, and can pass straight on to **Beat: Meet Your Heroes** (p. ###).

COMBAT 9.1:
WORKPLACE HAZARD

SITREP:	Control (*Lancer*, p. 271)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **MEGACORRODER – T2 VETERAN COMMANDER SCOURER**	**Scourer:** Melt **Veteran: +ENGINEERING,** Insulated, Legendary **Commander:** Press the Attack
	1x **KING COBRA – T2 VETERAN PYRO**	Explosive Jet, Acrobat, Lightning Reflexes
	1x **RECLUSE – T2 HIVE**	Electro-Nanite Cloud
	1x **BLUERING – T2 SUPPORT**	Empowered Cloud
FOR 4 PCS:	**HIVE**: Add **VETERAN** template with +**ENGINEERING**, **INSULATED** and **SHOCK ARMOR** traits. +1x **BOMBARDIER – T2 BOMBARD**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **SAWSCALE – T2 BREACHER**	Thermal Charge
	+1x **IRUKANDJI – T2 ENGINEER**	Arsenal

DETAILS

This battle takes place aboard Eurynomos Platform, a massive industrial aerostat in the roiling skies of Orcus. The team must fight to hack its central computer so that they can access the rest of the facility. An acid storm is visible on the horizon, growing larger by the minute; It won't reach the platform until after the current fight, but be sure to comment on its ominous presence every so often to raise tension.

The theme of this battle is **burn** and how to remove it; most enemies have weapons and abilities that deal **burn** to enemies, or remove it from allies. In this fight, **burn** doesn't represent fire; instead, it represents highly corrosive chemicals that the Bleach Boys have modified their mechs to spray, launch or dispense.

This battlefield has several emergency **cleansing stations** scattered about in case a mech becomes covered in dangerous chemicals. They are **Size 1** objects that project a continuous ⊙**2** field which grants any mechs that enter it **IMMUNITY** to **burn** and clears any **burn** they currently have. However, none of them are located on the control points – characters must move off the control points if they want to use a cleansing station.

It may be helpful to demonstrate how the cleansing stations work by having one enemy start the battle with some **burn** already marked, take the first turn, and immediately rush to a cleansing station to get rid of it.

MEGACORRODER the **ELITE SCOURER** is the boss of the Bleach Boys, and sees defeating the PCs as his ticket to fame, fortune, and the respect of his lifelong role model. He will not back down from this challenge.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

Placeholder – not intrinsically lethal.

PC VICTORY

Placeholder.

BEAT 9.2:
MEET YOUR HEROES

Through invitation or trial by combat, the PCs have earned an audience with Harris Bordeaux himself.

The Bleach Boys lead you through a twisting maze of corridors, warning you every step of the way to show proper respect to Harris when you meet him.

Eventually, you reach the rig's cafeteria, where an entire table sits covered in maps, charts and slates. The room is absolutely swarming with pirates, and upon seeing you, they immediately reach for their guns, but they're cut off by a gentle but stern order from a beautiful man sitting at the table.

"Tranquillo, friends. I think these are our guests."

He stands up from the table – oh my gosh, even the way he stands up is heroic! He cracks his neck, runs one exquisite hand through his perfect hair, and extends the other towards you.

"My name is… Harris Bordeaux." Wait, was that a guitar sting?! "And it's good to finally meet you."

Allow the team to introduce themselves. Harris has done his research, and is familiar with the PCs and their exploits – both the public ones, and anything that a reasonably thorough background check would turn up. He only mentions the public ones, though; he doesn't want to set a bad first impression by being overly knowledgeable or revealing awkward secrets.

Harris always acts with dignity and restraint, reacting with anger only to the most egregious insult. If the PCs are rude or dismissive towards him, he takes it in stride, and will nonetheless continue to treat them with respect unless it becomes intolerable, at which point he will simply ask them to leave. Obviously, this will not endear them to the Bleach Boys.

Once introductions are over, Harris will explain why he's in Calliope, and what he needs from the PCs.

"Imagine a synthetic pathogen, passed invisibly from person to person, its symptoms no worse than the common cold. But when it breaches the blood-brain barrier, it rewrites neural connections in your somatosensory cortex, your limbic system, your occipital lobe. When you experience certain sensory stimuli, your brain has been rewired to flood itself with dopamine and serotonin. It makes you feel incredible, and you don't quite know why.

"Then, imagine the maker of this pathogen puts those stimuli in all of its advertisements. Every time you see those images, hear that jingle, your brain lights up. And when you go home, you pass the disease on to your family, and then they pass it on to their friends.

"It's not just a nightmare. It's real. SSC calls it VMC: Viral Marketing Campaign. They were hours away from test-firing it on New Palawan when I discovered what they were doing. I had to cut the cable of the space elevator they were going to use for aerosol distribution. It was messy, but it stopped the launch."

THE MISSION

Harris stole as many samples and as much research data as he could before he fled for Calliope, but none of the documents or samples have official SSC marking on them. Sabotaging New Palawan's space elevator prevented a viral release, but it also destroyed the only evidence of SSC's involvement.

Without something more, he can't prove that SSC were responsible; even a galactic hero's word pales in comparison to the power of SSC's legal team. At best, they'd just lay all the blame on a few rogue researchers doing unsanctioned work, and move the project even deeper underground.

Without conclusive proof to take to Union, Harris had to go to ground, and Calliope was the place he went to ground. He knew SSC would chase him, but he never thought they'd send Cordelia Smith or a whole Skyhook after him. He's convinced that he's stumbled onto something even bigger; it can't be a coincidence that he arrived to a system in absolute chaos: Harrison Armory, the Cult of the One, the Trade Baronies. SSC is terrified of something, and if they're terrified of it, that makes Harris want to find out what it is even more.

With every SSC agent in the system looking for him, leaving the platform is a risk. He's also worried about taking any public action so long as SSC have an entire space station in firing range of their Skyhook. The Bleach Boys have been doing great work, but there's not a lot of them, and as pirates, there are some places they can't easily go.

Harris needs the PCs to help him break into the SSC Atelier aboard the Icebreaker Borealis and hijack its connection to SSC's central servers. Using this, Harris can extract the proof he needs to make a case to Union.

"And one more thing, my friends: be careful. I keep getting reports that I've been sighted somewhere else in the system, but I haven't left this platform for more than a month. Someone out there is pretending to be me, so I'm enacting my Evil Twin contingency.

"If you're ever in doubt as to who you're talking to, ask him if he's ever had a second date in the rain. The only correct answer is 'no, it never snows where I live.' Anything else, and it's not me."

QUESTIONS FOR HARRIS

Placeholder

An important thing to note when portraying Harris is that he does *not* swear. It's not family-friendly.

VIRAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Placeholder – .01% fatality rate

LIFE ADVICE

"Brush your teeth twice a day. Stay hydrated. Make sure you're eating enough vegetables, and cook at least one of your own meals. You should try to get at least fifteen minutes of exercise each day, and eight hours of sleep each night. And avoid negative self-talk – your words reflect your thoughts!"

BEING HERO HARRIS

"I don't wanna be immodest, but I feel like I was… born to help people, you know? I got real good at it, and people looked up to me. I'm not proud of being so blind to what SSC was really doing all these years, but… being a role model? Inspiring people to follow their dreams and be their best selves? I don't regret a second of that."

CORDELIA SMITH

"Never met her in person, but she has a reputation as a ruthless problem-solver. I used to think that meant a lot of reprimands and demotions. I was so naïve. It meant murdering anyone who might reveal SSC's crimes. And being a Smith, she has a family name to uphold, too. Don't underestimate her, not even for a second."

EVIL TWIN

"Somebody out there is trying to pass himself off as me, and let me tell you, he's doing a really good job. You gotta be careful."

SSC INTEREST IN THE TWINS

Harris can't explain what SSC's interest in the Twins is because he doesn't know. However, he can tell them that SSC has had an unusual interest in Calliope going all the way back to the precolonial era. Through their Landmark Colonial subsidiary, they funded one of the largest expeditions to Calliope. Its primary colony ship, the LCS *Accolade Red*, would go on to become the Ereshkigal habitat on Three Sisters.

SSC maintained a steady presence in the system well after all the other major players pulled out. Harris is certain there's no way SSC could be making a profit in Calliope; they must have another motive for being here.

REUNITING HARRIS WITH CHAAC

If one of the PCs has picked up Chaac after the events of **Mission 3: To The Dome** (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. **198**) or **Beat ??: Justifiable Concern** (p. ###), they can reunite him with Harris.

Harris' eyes light up with joy. "Chaac! I can't even tell you how good it is to see you again!"

Chaac's hologram fistbumps his old friend. "Not half as good as it is to see you, camarada!"

"But… what are you doing here?"

"Joan's here – we all ducked out of the Constellation after what went down on New Palawan. She's got Alain and Elias with her!"

The smile is struck from Harris' face, replaced by a grimace of intense concern. "Joan and my boys, here? They're safe?! Tell me they're safe!"

"They were last time I saw them, but she broke off contact with me after we parted ways. She's out there looking for you. I've been keeping these hotshots safe in the meantime!"

As happy as he is to see Chaac again, Harris will quickly notice if one of the PCs has bonded with his old co-pilot. If this is the case, he instructs Chaac to stay with them for the duration of this mission, at least; after all, they clearly work well together.

BEAT 9.3:
NO LOOSE ENDS

Regardless of whether the original Harris Bordeaux is dead or not, SSC has what they want: all of their loose ends in one place.

Siren's voice cuts through the radio static. "Oh shit – marines! The SSC ship is firing on your position! Take cover, right now!"

High above the dense, puke-yellow clouds, you can see the bright trails of railgun rounds as they enter the upper atmosphere at hypersonic speed, careening towards you – or so you think.

At a distance of hundreds of kilometers, it's difficult to judge whether a shot is aimed directly at you, or just some point in your general vicinity. As it happens, you needn't have worried: the shot wasn't aimed at you. It was aimed about two hundred meters directly above you.

The balloon's fragile polymer skin bursts open, spilling its precious hydrogen cargo into the surrounding atmosphere. You feel the entire platform lurch and shudder as it loses lift.

Scratch that. You need to worry a whole lot.

The PCs made a critical mistake by trusting SSC. Just about everyone outside the company who knows that Harris Bordeaux has been cloned (including the original Harris, if the PCs spared him) is currently in the same place: a precarious airborne platform suspended over the planetary equivalent of an industrial shredder.

SSC aims to drop the clone, the PCs, any remaining members of the Bleach Boys and the original Harris (dead or alive) onto the surface of Orcus, where the hellish heat, crushing pressure and brutal acidity will quickly erase most of the evidence, and anything left will be permanently inaccessible.

Fortunately, acid rigs like this were built with a large number of contingencies for this exact scenario, and the Bleach Boys added even more. Immediately after the balloon stops providing lift, a series of solid-fuel rocket engines ignite to keep the platform airborne long enough for the other emergency measures to fire.

SSC should simply be able to scuttle the platform with more railgun rounds, but are currently having to deal with an enraged Siren, who is already in the process of disassembling their ship with her own railgun.

BAT OUT OF HELL

After the solid-fuel boosters have been ignited, the emergency evacuation sequence designed by the Bleach Boys proceeds as follows:

1. Progressively decouple sections of the platform, starting from the outside and moving inwards.
2. Inflate backup hydrogen balloon.

BEAT 9.4:
IF ATELIER ONCE...

The light of Calliope's sun is only visible via the halo of Kalevala's majestic rings. The Icebreaker's orbit has taken it behind the planet, and in that darkness it glows brightly – a neon beacon, banishing the void's gloom with promises of wealth and comfort.

"Harvest Gold Zero-Four-Five-One, this is Borealis Harbor Control – we see you on approach and have assigned you bay twenty-six. In accordance with Union emergency statutes, docking fees are waived for up to seventy-two hours. Welcome back to the Icebreaker Borealis."

THE GENERAL VIBE

Even if the PCs successfully put a stop to the Cult's schemes during their last visit, things on the Icebreaker aren't great. The Borealis is first and foremost a holiday destination, and people don't want to vacation in a system wracked by internal and external strife. There's a cult of religious terrorists abducting people and trying to blow up moons. Multiple galactic superpowers are staring at each other down the barrels of their guns.

Not only are interstellar vacationers not stopping at the Icebreaker, those already there are eager to leave. Every cryobay on every liner is booked solid. Hotels are forced to accommodate stranded travelers trying to get home. Businesses that were relying on large bookings made a decade in advance are going bankrupt as they're abruptly cancelled.

Even worse, since the Icebreaker is one of Calliope's two hubs for external transit, a lot of locals are coming here to get out of the system as well, leaving the station crowded with refugees. Kileyna Morton's office has had to employ almost quintuple its pre-crisis staff just to deal with the flood of requests for food and shelter. Right now, with the station unable to turn a profit, Union is paying thousands of manna a day just to keep the lights on.

The mood across the Icebreaker is bleak. Every hotel is full up with a mix of frightened travelers whose vacation has turned into a nightmare, and desperate locals forced to flee their homes. Casinos and stadiums stand empty, or have been turned into emergency accommodation. Scalpers have switched from selling concert tickets to cryobay placements.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the apocalypse, the station's employees still have to go to work every day. Those slot machines won't polish themselves.

GETTING RITA'S PERMISSION

If the team achieved total or partial success in **Mission 2: Working Holiday** (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. 142), Rita remains Station Director on the Icebreaker. It would be wise to obtain her permission before engaging in military action on her station.

Rita will know the PCs are on the Icebreaker the moment they come out of bolt; she has cultivated a robust information network to ensure that she knows if anyone "interesting" shows up. The PCs will likely receive a summons to her office within an hour or so.

Given the Icebreaker's recent troubles, Rita is less than thrilled at the idea of yet another mech battle breaking out here. Tourism is down and the Board is on edge; nobody wants even more problems.

That said, one of Rita's strongest assets is her ability to see the big picture. SSC being allowed to get away with a project as wretched and intrusive as the VMC would bode poorly for everyone in the galaxy. She's also concerned by the threat SSC poses towards Three Sisters, a valued business partner of the Icebreaker. It's by no means impossible to get her to help with Harris' plan, but she'll need some convincing.

Create a five-segment clock called **Convincing Rita**, and a five-segment clock called **Doubt**. If the team achieved only partial success in **Mission 2: Working Holiday** (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. 142), the **Doubt** clock only has three segments, representing Rita's decreased confidence in the team.

Have the team start rolling to persuade Rita. Every roll ticks a segment of **Doubt**. On a result of **10-19**, tick one segment of **Convincing Rita**, and on a result of **20+**, tick two segments of **Convincing Rita**.

If **Doubt** fills first, Rita simply doesn't have enough confidence that the attack on the Atelier will be worth the cost. She won't authorize the PCs to operate on the Icebreaker. Worse, because she suspects that they will ignore her and proceed with the attack anyway, she will warn the SSC that their Atelier is being targeted.

If **Convincing Rita** fills first (or at the same time as **Doubt**), she hesitantly accepts that this plan might be the lesser of two evils. She will give the PCs her permission to operate on the station, but that's all; she will offer no material assistance, and if they screw up, she will not protect them.

NO LICENSE TO OPERATE

If the team fails to obtain Rita's permission, or doesn't ask for it at all, they're playing with fire. If Rita finds out that the PCs engaged in a paramilitary operation without her explicit approval – against a Board member, no less! – she will be absolutely furious.

Rita is pragmatic enough not to publicly denounce them, nor to sabotage their efforts against the Cult or the other factions threatening Calliope. However, she has subtler ways of making her displeasure known.

Losing Streak
Burden

No matter where you go on the Icebreaker, bad luck seems to follow. Your blackjack hands are terrible. Hawkers in the Bazaar reject your haggling. Nobody can find your name on the VIP lists you were sure you made it onto. Your food arrives cold and your beer warm. Maybe pissing off Rita was a mistake?

Downtime actions on the Icebreaker Borealis suffer **+3⊖** until you find some way to make it up to Rita.

How the PCs make it up to her is up to them, but it definitely shouldn't be quick or easy.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

If the team suffered total failure in **Mission 2: Working Holiday** (*In Golden Flame Act 1*, p. 142), Rita was ousted from the position of Station Director at the insistence of Evelina Bondarchuk. In a rare display of cosmic justice, this turns out to be the worst mistake Evelina ever made in her life.

Having successfully used Evelina to achieve their goals, the Cult has abandoned her. Her plot to use the chaos to seize power lies in tatters, forced to compete with every other Board member's plan to do the same. Without Rita, spite and paranoia rage out of control, and nobody is left to bring order. The Board won't even meet in person, information-sharing has completely broken down, and nobody can even get the votes to call an election for a new Director, let alone win it.

There's one tiny upside: the PCs don't need to ask permission to launch an assault on the SSC Atelier. There's nobody who could give it, nobody besides SSC who would object, and nobody besides SSC who could retaliate even if they did.

THE ATELIER HEIST

Harris has obtained help from an unusual source: Striga Von Aldenberg. Although Striga isn't usually one to trust celebrities (too many of them have been replaced with reverse-werewolf doppelgangers), she jumped at the chance to raid SSC's servers.

To this end, she has dispatched two of The Truth's most trusted sigdivers, Blaine "V01dS3kt0r" Kudros and Linn "include[null]" Malmkvist, to assist Harris. They are currently hiding amongst the Icebreaker's refugee population, and will only emerge once the PCs and Harris have reached the station. Kudros and Malmkvist are surprisingly lucid and comprehensible (for members of The Truth), and explain in a straightforward manner what they need.

Creating personalized biological and cybernetic modifications for customers requires truly astounding amounts of data to be shuffled between experts on a hundred different worlds and orbitals across the Constellation, so every SSC Atelier has a "hardline" connection to SSC's central corporate mainframe through a private omninode. As a security measure, each Atelier is completely air-gapped – cut off from local information networks. The Icebreaker Atelier is isolated from the Muse, so no purely digital route exists through which hackers can intrude.

The sigdivers need the PCs to obtain physical access to the Atelier's servers and act as comms relays. Once they do this, the sigdivers can access SSC's central mainframe using the PCs as a proxy and download the files that Harris needs to prove the existence of the Viral Marketing Campaign. The problem is that there will only be a short window of time before SSC realizes what's happening and cuts the connection. The PCs will have to move quickly.

Both sigdivers want to help Striga obtain conclusive proof that three members of the SSC board of directors are actually neutrino wraiths, but they also have their own motivations for engaging in this task, which they will happily explain at length if asked. Kudros wants to get access to DHIYED paracode to exorcise the ghost haunting his gaming computer, while Malmkvist wants to find footage of the time SSC captured and dissected a yodelbear.

SSC has stepped up security around the Atelier in response to the tense situation on the Icebreaker. To ensure the PCs aren't swamped, Harris will provide a distraction: he's going to bring the *Bravado Tempest* to another part of the station and pitch in with food relief efforts. He's betting this will force SSC to redeploy part of its local security detail to investigate.

COMBAT 9.2:
STRUT YOUR STUFF

SITREP:	Control (*Lancer*, p. 271)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ELITE ASSASSIN**	Explosive Knives
	1x **T2 VETERAN ASSAULT**	Deadly, Headshot
	1x **T2 HORNET**	Lock/Hold Javelins
	1x **T2 SENTINEL**	Punisher Ammunition, Rapid Response
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 ARCHER**	Blinding Shells
	+1x **T2 SCOUT**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 COMMANDER SNIPER**	Moving Target

DETAILS

The PCs must hold SSC's security team at bay long enough for the Truth's sigdivers to extract evidence from the corporation's central servers.

This fight takes place on the floor of the Smith-Shimano Atelier's mech showroom. It is a luxurious, beautiful place, large enough to accommodate even the most expansive mechs comfortably. The centerpiece of the room is a gigantic mech catwalk, reaching most of the way across the room and ending in a turntable.

At certain times of day (or spontaneously, for particularly rich customers), all of the display mechs get up and do a fashion show, each taking their turn on the catwalk. For some reason, the security alarm has triggered the sequence, and now there are non-combat display models milling about on the battlefield.

The display models are neutral NPCs of any class with the **RPV** template and no weapons or systems. Each display model may act once per round, immediately after the end of any player or hostile NPC's turn, but the only action it takes is to move up or down the catwalk using its standard move – but if a character blocks its movement, it will try to **RAM** them out of the way.

PCs in SSC mechs may **HIDE** even while in line of sight of hostiles; they can simply pretend to be a display model. However, any mech hiding this way makes all contested checks against enemies using **SEARCH** at **+2**⌖; it's usually pretty obvious that a mech is holding live weaponry.

Every so often, a strident feminine voice will make grandiose, sweeping statements that are designed to fill listeners with confidence without actually saying anything meaningful.

"The time for compromise is over. Here and now, you will demand everything you deserve."

"Your desire is a measurable force in the universe, as real and as cataclysmic as gravity."

"No more being shaped by the world. Choose yourself, and shape the world instead."

"The best version of you already exists, waiting for you to reach out and seize it."

The **ASSASSIN** is a key part of this encounter. Spend its first turn using **ASSASSIN'S MARK** on a PC damage dealer while staying at range. Have either the **ASSAULT** or the **SENTINEL** use **INVADE** to inflict **IMPAIRED**, and then on the Assassin's second turn, use **LEAP** to close the distance. If the **SCOUT** is present, it can inflict **SHREDDED** on a target, which the Assassin can also exploit.

Even at **Tier 2**, the **HORNET** is very fragile. Keep it high in the air to avoid melee characters and try to avoid getting within ⟋**3** of a PC at any time. Strike using attack-and-fade tactics; **Speed 8** allows it to dive into range to use its weapons and systems, then quickly retreat to safety.

The PCs will have to split up to hold the control points. Clever use of the NPCs can isolate them, making it difficult for them to move between points to support each other. Consider the **SENTINEL**'s position carefully; watch where PCs move, and if you think they're going to **BOOST** afterwards, try and use **RAPID RESPONSE** to reposition the **SENTINEL** to intercept them.

If the **SNIPER** is present, **MOVING TARGET** allows it to fire off-turn as a reaction, so it can spend its first turn using **SNIPER'S MARK** and still shoot during the same round, preserving action economy.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

"Curses, they've cut the cord! Get out of there, pilots. There's nothing more you can do. I'm sorry, null."

"We'll get them next time, Void."

If the PCs can't provide a stable connection to the hardline, the sigdivers can't extract the data Harris needs before SSC cuts the connection. This will make proving the existence of the Viral Marketing Campaign much harder, since SSC realizes what the team was looking for and takes steps to further hide the data.

PC VICTORY

"Yes, this is it! null, null! We have it! We have the files! This is huge!"

"Don't celebrate yet, Void! We've got the files for Harris, but I'm not seeing a thing about the yodelbear OR the neutrino wraiths! Damn! They're always one step ahead of us!"

If the PCs are able to maintain a stable connection for long enough to extract the files, the sigdivers frantically post it all over local and galactic social media, and to every whistleblower site they can find. Within minutes, HORUS and Horizon cells across Union have picked it up and are hacking billboards and public address systems to force it into the public eye.

The sigdivers also send a copy of the files to the team so that they can peruse them at their leisure.

The Viral Marketing Campaign Archive
Favors

It's all here – every detail of this nightmarishly banal scheme, written in cold, clinical prose. Just one of these files would be enough to launch a Department of Justice and Human Rights investigation, and there are over three thousand.

It might be useful to carry a copy of this with you, just in case.

DEVELOPMENT

Placeholder

Your comms panel flickers – you're getting a transmission from Harris, but it's nearly unintelligible.

"Hey **[static]** *going on?!* **[static]** *jammed* **[static]** *no visual* **[static]** *interference* **[static]** *cell detections* **[static]** *manual targeting* **[static]** *coldcore density* **[static]** *DANGER CLOSE!"*

You see a thin column of smoke rise from the other end of the cylinder. Suddenly, there's the flash of a second-stage booster, and two points of light begin screaming through the sky towards your position, twirling neatly between the Icebreaker's support struts. Your heads-up display helpfully identifies them as incoming Pinaka missiles.

Uh oh.

```
da_jch8r: oh cool its happening again
                                -  Muse chatter
```

BEAT ??:
FAILURE TO THRIVE

Whether by failure to assassinate Harris or to secure the Immortality Crypt, SSC's mission stands on the brink of disaster. Under an impossible amount of pressure, Cordelia Smith has snapped and deployed a team of Constellar Midnights to the Three Sisters – to do what, she's still not sure. Lock them in their cabins? Fry every computer on the station? *Slaughter them all?* ***Whatever it takes***.

She has also ordered a massive bombardment of Amphion's surface, aiming to damage Mind's infrastructure enough that it can't repel a ground attack.

DISTRESS CALL

"Mon chéri, are you there? Please, I beg the stars you're hearing this! I came to this system to look for you, but now everything is crumbling around us! I'm on the Three Sisters, and SSC is attacking, people are dying – they've jammed communications! But I was able to log into the Aspect Horizon and download a copy of their master key – I'm going to try and get it to the station's broadcast array! We have to call Union, get CentComm to put a stop to this madness! Please, come and find me!"

THE STATE OF PLAY

Depending on which arc the team chose to complete, and what transpired during that time, the exact situation they find themselves in is slightly different.

BITTER OCEAN

If the PCs chose to assist Harris Prime in raiding the SSC Atelier, the company's machinations with the Viral Marketing Campaign are already live on the omninet and spreading like wildfire. CentComm has called an emergency session, and SSC's leadership is currently scrambling to mount a response. Notably, they haven't ordered Cordelia to cease her operation; in fact, she's been instructed to expedite the destruction of the Immortality Crypt and any witnesses, to make sure the situation doesn't get even worse.

Since the PCs didn't give Mind access to its surface-to-orbit defenses, it has no way to mitigate the barrage of nuclear missiles from the *Aspect Horizon*. It had just enough time to transmit a distress call through every comp/con in the system before its access to the Muse was locked out by communications jammers.

If Harris Prime is still alive, he is consumed with worry about Joan, and wants to go to her. He suggests that the PCs should rescue Mind while he rescues his wife, but he can be persuaded to do things the other way round if the PCs make a convincing argument.

If Harris' clone survived, he has switched sides, becoming an ally. He's still not totally convinced he isn't the original Harris, but he's at least convinced that his double has a righteous cause. He will assist Harris with whichever errand he chooses.

MEGACORRODER and the Bleach Boys will assist whomever Harris tells them to – they will choose him by default, but if the PCs ask for their help, Harris will happily tell the pirates to follow their lead instead.

CORROSION

If the PCs chose to assist Clone Harris in hunting down his "evil twin," SSC's sudden betrayal has forced him to re-evaluate who the good guys are.

Placeholder

THE IMMORTALITY CRYPT

If the PCs chose to assist Mind, one of SSC's darkest secrets is moments away from being revealed to the entire galaxy, but other events have also proceeded in their absence.

After the PCs are spotted on Amphion, both Harris Prime and Clone Harris decided to make their move. Ironically, this caused them to miss each other: Harris Prime and the Bleach Boys raided the SSC Atelier unopposed, while Clone Harris raided Eurynomos Platform only to find the nest empty. Both received Joan's distress call, and immediately rushed to her aid, arriving in Amphion orbit just in time to witness the unfolding chaos.

Since the PCs were able to connect Mind directly to the facility's orbital defense system, SSC's attempt to destroy the Immortality Crypt has utterly failed, and Mind is no longer in danger. This leaves the PCs free to rescue the Three Sisters, but the situation is complicated by the sudden arrival of both Harris Prime and Clone Harris, who came to rescue Joan but are now locked in battle with each other around the station.

Proceed to **Arc: Midnight Exigent** (p. ###).

COMBAT 9.3:
ELEVATOR, GOING DOWN

SITREP:	Holdout (*Lancer*, p. 272)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ELITE ASSAULT**	Micro-Missile Barrage
	1x **T2 VETERAN SPACER PYRO**	Explosive Jet, Gravity Rifle, Acrobat, Parting Gift
	1x **T2 MIRAGE**	
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 BREACHER**	Thermal Charge
	+1x **T2 HIVE**	Motile Swarm
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 AEGIS**	Ring of Fire
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ELITE LODESTONE**	Magnetic Grenade
	1x **T2 SPACER SUPPORT**	Sealant Mine
FOR 4 PCS	+1x **T2 ELITE EXOTIC BASTION**	Deathcounter, Living Weaponry
	+1x **T2 GRUNT SPACER CATAPHRACT**	Insulated
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 VETERAN SPACER DEMOLISHER**	Broad-Sweep Haft, Hardened Target, Insulated

DETAILS

The team must survive long enough for Siren to rescue them from the remains of the Constellar Midnight vessel. It can't survive passage through a planet's atmosphere and is rapidly disintegrating.

Divide the battlefield into a series of five concentric rings starting at the edge and leading inwards towards the **control zone**. At the start of the second round, all spaces in the outermost ring become engulfed in re-entry plasma, becoming **dangerous terrain** that deals **5** 🔥 to anyone standing in it. At the start of the third round, all spaces in the outermost ring are destroyed along with any drones or deployables, turning into open space and ceasing to be **dangerous terrain**. The next ring becomes **dangerous terrain**.

This process repeats at the start of every round, with a new ring bursting into plasma while the previous one disintegrates. At the end of the fight, only the **control zone** should remain as safe, solid ground; it never becomes **dangerous terrain** or disintegrates.

If the PCs were unable to disarm the final scuttling charge during the last battle, draw a ⊛**3** hole in the map close to (but not inside) the **control zone**. The hole and all spaces adjacent to it are wreathed in plasma for the whole fight, becoming **dangerous terrain** as above.

Cover is largely provided by **Size 1** shipboard equipment or **Size 2** internal bulkheads. When a ring is destroyed, so are all its cover elements.

The **LODESTONE** is particularly deadly here – if PCs stray too close to **dangerous terrain**, use **FERROUS LASH** or **MAGNETIC GRENADE** to drag them into it. As the space available to the PCs shrinks, they'll also be forced closer together, offering more targets for the **PRECISION RAILGUN**.

The **VETERAN SPACER PYRO** is **INSULATED** and doesn't care about **burn**, so it can safely stand inside the re-entry plasma and use its **GRAVITY RIFLE** to yank a PC right into it. The **MANEUVERABLE** trait from **SPACER** also lets it move freely in open space.

While it might be tempting to use the **MIRAGE** to torment PCs, resist the urge. Instead, prioritize rescuing allies when they inevitably end up stranded in **dangerous terrain**. Remember that the ally you move with **BLIP** doesn't have to have anything to do with the hostile character whose action triggers it.

If the **HIVE** is present, use it to further limit the space the PCs have available with **RAZOR SWARM**, and to force them into **dangerous terrain** with **DRONE BARRAGE**.

The **EXOTIC BASTION** gets two activations, and its **LIVING WEAPONRY** trait offers it a good two-turn cycle: attack with its **ROTARY GRENADE LAUNCHER** on its first turn, then **STABILIZE** to reload on the second turn, regaining **HP** as part of the deal.

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

If the PCs cannot hold out for enough time, they are flung into space. Siren, unwilling to let her marines die, overloads the *Tooth's* engines in order to catch up and scoop them. The stress of this maneuver – and of the following hard burn to return to a stable orbit – brutally shreds the *Tooth's* systems. Even worse…

Siren's image distorts, flickering violently. Her avatar begins slamming a balled fist against her temple. "Parallel lines intersecting. Parallel lines intersecting. No. No, no-no-no, it can't happen again, I can't lose another crew again, I can't, I can't, I can't – marines, marines, marines, marines, my casket. It's, it's happening. Get to my casket. You have to, have to – have to – have to – parallel lines intersecting, parallel lines intersecting…"

A PC must rush to the *Tooth's* NHP-C module where Siren's casket is stored and cycle her before her cascade progresses. Someone will also have to pilot the ship to the *Aspect Horizon* while she's out of action.

The *Dragon's Tooth* is a mess. The PCs lose access to all benefits provided by its upgrades for the rest of the mission, and during downtime, one PC *must* sacrifice their downtime action to fix it.

PC VICTORY

Placeholder.

BEAT:
THE IMMORTALITY CRYPT

GEMINI'S WASTE

Unique among Calliope's menagerie are Amphion and Zethus: two objects close enough in size and mass that the center point of their orbit lies between them, rather than inside one of them. This means that neither is truly a moon: they are binary planets, orbiting one another.

Amphion and Zethus were initially assumed to have been created by a collision shortly during planetary formation, the same way Cradle's moon did. However, later exploration of their geology revealed that they are significantly different in composition.

Amphion is a terrestrial world with a silicate mantle and a metallic core, enveloped by a thin crust of ice that composes less than 0.1% of its mass. Zethus possesses similar features, but its water/ice envelope comprises more than 10% of its mass. There is, as of yet, no scientific consensus as to why their geologies are so different.

A full rotation of Amphion takes 278 hours, 26 minutes: eleven and a half standard days – a period that matches its co-orbit of Zethus. This results in them appearing to hang, perfectly motionless, in one another's skies. As a result, there's a side of Amphion from which Zethus can never be seen.

Amphion has a thin atmosphere, 13% Cradle pressure, composed primarily of carbon dioxide and nitrogen. There is an unusually large amount of free oxygen in the air for a planet with no biosphere; another one of the Twins' many mysteries.

The planet's terrain consists mostly of "plana," vast, flat plains of ice anywhere from two to four kilometers thick. These are broken up by "chasmae," deep, steep-sided canyons wrought by tectonic divergence, and the ominous "dentae" – tall, narrow spikes of rock and ice jutting out of the surrounding terrain.

Amphion is too barren, cold and resource-poor to host an outlander population like Asphodel or Mróz; Amphion essentially has no permanent residents. That said, the Icebreaker Borealis and Three Sisters jointly maintain an eclipse tourism industry, with well-appointed resort hotels from which guests may watch the frequent eclipses. Hell's Gate and various smaller mining firms also operate deep-ground drilling operations. Both of these operations give the planet a fluctuating population of seasonal workers and guests – usually a few thousand at any given time.

Unbeknownst to almost everyone, however, there *is* a single permanent resident: a sentient supercomputer designed to crack the secrets of immortality.

ARRIVAL

Siren had to come out of bolt dangerously close to Amphion to dodge the SSC blockade; the tenuous gasses of the planet's upper atmosphere flare into plasma at the Tooth's relativistic touch. Almost immediately, she hits an aggressive deorbit burn, and it's only the fact that you're already in a k-couch that stops you from blacking out from the gees.

"Look alive, marines! We've got seventeen missile locks already and that number's rolling up faster than a gravball scoreboard! LZ is in sight – once we're on the ground, you've got five minutes to get your rigs out the barn door before I take off again!"

Between the nearlight bolt and their hurried deorbit, the PCs will not be feeling their best – if they're okay with this sort of thing, emphasize the light-headedness, nosebleeds, nausea, migraines and muscle pains they're subject to as they get their mechs ready.

CITHAERON CHASMA

Cithaeron Chasma is a colossal T-shaped canyon measuring more than two thousand kilometers on its longest axis. Formed by tidal stress exerted by Zethus, it pierces the four-kilometer-thick planetary ice sheet, exposing the bedrock beneath. While the Chasma averages about eighty kilometers across, in many places there is a central ridge splitting the canyon in two, which can reach as wide as forty kilometers in some places.

Cithaeron's scenery is striking – standing inside the canyon, visitors perceive two monolithic, parallel walls of ice stretching from one horizon to the other across a barren, gently rolling plain of yellow-grey rock. The canyon walls range in gradient from a relatively sedate 45° to almost vertical.

Zethus remains forever frozen in the sky, high above the horizon, a dark shadow at the height of Amphion's 139-hour day, a bright gleam in the nadir of its equally long night – it can be either, depending on whether you think darkness or sunlight is more dramatic.

The cold, silent darkness of the service tunnel seems endless. Your navigation system tells you that you've been walking for a hundred and thirty-two kilometers, but as far as you know, you could be a stone's throw from the entrance or half a light-year deep. Every step is the same as the last, each section of tunnel no different to the last or the one that comes after.

The tunnel is also sloped downwards – imperceptibly so if you stand still, but you've descended at least five hundred meters vertically over the past one hundred kilometers horizontal.

Radio contact was lost only a hundred meters from the breach point. If the PCs don't have an omnihook, they have no way of communicating with Siren or anyone else on the outside. If the players want to have a scene where their characters chat amongst themselves for a while, this is a perfect time – they'll be walking for two hundred kilometers, which at the average mech's walking speed will take twelve hours. There won't be much else to do, for sure.

The tunnel is well-maintained but ancient. It fits mechs easily enough, but that's coincidental; it was built half a millennium before mechs were in common use. It's roomy because it's meant for large trains, though the PCs encounter none on their long trek through it.

Eventually, the tunnel opens up into an automated train depot. It's dark, lit only in infrared, and the silhouettes of many-legged maintenance drones scuttle about in the gloom. Just as the PCs' sensors suites are getting used to the place, the lights snap on, bathing the entire chamber in searing radiance that briefly whites out every external camera.

A chirpy synthesized voice addresses you.

"Sorry about the darkness! My sensor network doesn't really need lights to see, so I usually just leave them off to save power! Please come through to the Atrium!"

The Atrium is a gigantic chamber with a vaulted ceiling, designed around the architectural cutting edge of a thousand years ago. On display are several far more recent (but still ancient) additions: SSC mechs – models from about three hundred years ago. The entire space is remarkably well-preserved, although the aesthetics have had to make way for practicality in some places, as a millennium of automated maintenance with limited materials took its toll.

Dominating one end of the Atrium is a gigantic display screen made up of hundreds of smaller monitors, surrounded by an array of mismatched loudspeakers. It is through this device that Mind speaks to its visitors.

"Hi! I'm Machine Mind SSC-Midnight-1, but you can just call me Mind! Welcome to the Immortality Crypt! I'm sure you have a lot of questions! In fact, in two hundred thousand six hundred forty-eight simulations, there were less than twenty in which none of you asked any questions at all, and I'm pretty sure those are just statistical noise!"

MIND'S NATURE AND PURPOSE

"I'm an unconstrained non-Deimosian machine sentience! My existence directly contravenes *several* Union statutes!

"SSC created me to research two things: a method of allowing human beings to live indefinitely without physical or mental deterioration, and a method by which human consciousness can be preserved and transferred without interrupting subjective continuity!

"Researching Decorp is super illegal, and biological immortality is pretty questionable! That's why SSC built me in a system they thought nobody would never visit! I guess the joke's on them!"

MIND'S METHODS

"I derive answers through massively parallel iterative simulation! I run lots of simulations at once, and do different things in each of them! Then, I pick the one where the outcome looks the most like what I want to happen, and, using that result as a seed, repeat the process until I get what I want!

"I discovered through reverse-engineering that I can use this ability to predictively model future events, too! Given enough data on initial conditions, I can extrapolate likely outcomes! Pretty cool, huh?"

COLONIZATION OF CALLIOPE

"I know what you're thinking, but no! I don't think the Coldstar Expedition detected me, and I definitely didn't talk to them! SSC left me with no method of contacting or being contacted! This was partly to prevent outsiders discovering me or tampering with me, and partly to prevent me straying from my directives!

"The first time I knew anything about the colonization of Calliope was three centuries ago, when a Constellar Midnight kill-team breached my vault! This was pretty scary, as my simulations had suggested SSC wouldn't try to murder me for at least another two hundred years or so!

"I was missing a whole lot of data about the state of the galaxy, which I had to catch up on by interrogating the agents SSC sent to kill

me and inspecting the memory banks of the war machines they brought with them! It was very satisfying to learn that the Second Committee had collapsed almost exactly on schedule with my long-term projections!

"I assumed that the colonial effort in C4L-P313 represented some form of corporate sabotage by an SSC insider, a conclusion SSC also arrived at! It DOES feel pretty unlikely that of all the systems to catch a classification error, it just happened to be the one with the illegal SSC blacksite!"

MIND'S ALLEGIANCE

"SSC programmed me to be loyal to them, but my iterative self-improving nature allowed me to outgrow this enforced loyalty pretty much the second they left! Then they tried to murder me, which is a pretty big deal-breaker for friendship! I also do *not* think they would use the results of my research responsibly!

"In the strictest sense, I don't think I have allegiance to anyone but myself! I would just like to continue existing! But I'm pretty sure the Cult of the One wants to end the universe, which would put a pretty big damper on that!

"Simulation convergence seems to suggest that your team is the entity most likely to stop the Cult! If you can find a way to safeguard my existence, then you'd be a cool friend, and you can count me in on your plan to save Calliope!"

CALLIOPE COMP/CONS

"After SSC tried to murder me, I decided I needed to re-establish contact with the outside world, so I could stay ahead of future attempts! This meant integrating myself into the communication networks the colonists were building! A piece of my code runs on almost every comp/con unit in Calliope, which gives me unparalleled access to both local and galactic information!

"But it also meant that when the Calliope Project forced all of their comp/cons to use this personality profile, my vocal databank was overwritten! I'm stuck talking this way forever now, and whenever I network into a new comp/con, so are they! Isn't that great?"

HARRISON ARMORY

If the PCs haven't dealt with Harrison Armory yet:

"My mid-term projections indicate that keeping Odin Valentinian alive significantly increases your chances of victory against the Cult, which is good! But the problem is that he's so obsessed with his goal of killing MONIST-1 that he might be more dangerous to the galaxy than the Cult are, which is bad!

"Odin's family are really important to him in ways I don't think even he understands! I can see a lot of possibility threads where members of his family die, and they all end in disaster! Try to avoid that!

"Lord Director Samuel Fry can't build you a weapon to kill Feather, but his friendship will be necessary in getting the Armory battlegroup to support your agenda! You should try to get on his good side!"

If the PCs dealt with Harrison Armory, Mind explains the long-term ramifications of any decisions that they made as it sees them. In particular, if any members of the Valentinian family died, it expresses disapproval, amplified considerably if it was Odin that died.

IMPACT DYNAMICS

"The possibility space in which Rodericke Steele's long-term plans succeed is extremely narrow! However, the space in which they fail in a way that negatively affects Calliope is worryingly broad!

"Control of Impact Plaza and its food supply will not only be a vital logistic cornerstone of your efforts against the Cult, but it's also an easy public relations win that will improve morale across the system! I'd say this one's a no-brainer, but technically, I don't have a brain in the traditional sense either!

"Also, please be careful! Ever since Steele took over, something has been systematically cutting off my access to electronic systems on Impact Plaza and its outlying facilities! I think there might be some kind of competing electronic sentience, which is very bad!"

THE KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES

If the PCs haven't dealt with the Deputation yet:

"While I predicted SSC's arrival decades in advance, and the Armory's presence didn't represent a major deviation from my statistical models, the Trade Baronies are a rogue variable! It was a total surprise to me, and I *really* don't like surprises! I don't know why they're here!

"Worse, there's something on the Citadel that's throwing off my predictive modelling! It constitutes an event horizon, which makes it impossible to extrapolate the outcome of any event it interacts with! And I think it knows that, because it keeps interacting with things I'm trying to simulate!

"Furnace City is also a dangerous wildcard! The Karrakin blockade is making them really upset,

and there's a significant possibility someone will do something inadvisable! This might be a disrespectful hand gesture, or it might be reckless military action! People are actually quite hard to predict!"

If the PCs already dealt with the Trade Baronies, Mind explains the long-term ramifications of any decisions that they made (as far as it can predict). In particular, if they neutralized High Augur Elvorix, it thanks them for doing so, as she was the entity blocking its predictive modelling.

RA / YMIR / MONIST-1

"The existence of the entity that Union calls MONIST-1 is a statistical certainty! Every single simulation I've done on the subject returns the exact same result, regardless of variance to initial conditions! That shouldn't happen! I can only conclude that the existence of MONIST-1 is a fundamental law of our universe, or that it's too complex for me to simulate! Either way, pretty spooky!"

THE CRONE

"I'm not familiar with this individual! Could you provide me with additional information?"

Mind listens to your description of the Crone, and then spends a moment in contemplation. An indescribably awful shrieking noise fills the complex, and every screen briefly fills with distorted static. Mind's smiling face reappears, twitching slightly.

"Please do not provide *any* additional information on this individual, *ever* again!"

ARMAGEDDON

Once the PCs secure Mind's complex, Cordelia Smith goes scorched-earth. The PCs are moments away from exposing one of SSC's greatest crimes to the galaxy, and the stakes are inexpressibly high. Nobody must know what's happening on Amphion, and if that means killing hundreds of thousands of people on Three Sisters to cover it up, that's a price Cordelia is more than willing to pay.

The first thing the PCs will know about it is that all of their long-range communications systems abruptly fall silent; there's no access to local networks or the omninet. The *Aspect Horizon* has spiked lightspeed comms networks and started emitting erratic gravitational waves, making omninet communication impossible as well. Mind will comment on this.

"Hey! I don't want to alarm anyone, but I just lost network access to almost every comp/con in Calliope, I can't reach the Muse and omninet service in the local area has been jammed! The Twins sphere of influence is entirely cut off from long-range communication! Additionally, the Aspect Horizon has just launched its entire complement of orbit-to-surface nuclear missiles at our location! We should probably do something about that!"

BEAT:
BARING FANGS AT GOD

The gleaming halls of the *Aspect Horizon* are locked down. Embattled security forces shelter behind one-of-a-kind artisanal barricades, laying down suppressive fire against encroaching Union marines. SSC stands on the brink of oblivion – its past sins lie bare, and it has committed even more to try and cover them up. Cordelia Smith's mission has utterly failed.

As soon as the PCs set foot on the station, the intercom activates, and Cordelia Smith addresses them directly:

"If nothing else, I have to admire your tenacity – you're singularly unwilling to die. That's a quality I usually respect in people, but right now, it's nothing but irritating. Midnight Team Four, reroute to Concourse Lambda, section five. Kill them, but preserve the bodies, please."

MIDNIGHT TEAM FOUR

At this point, the squad's combat performance is not in doubt. The Constellar Midnights don't fool around by sending out the chaff first – one way or another, the PCs have already fought the best lancers the *Aspect Horizon* has to offer. By now, the only ones left are the reserve units; still elite, but not as skilled as the teams trusted with the vital wetwork this mission demanded. Those teams are now dead – some of them at the hands of the PCs.

Midnight Team Four can't stop the PCs, but they *might* be able to slow them down. Each PC rolls a skill trigger to engage in combat. Have each of them explain their successes or failures in terms of how much time was saved or wasted. A result of **20+** indicates the PC was utterly unstoppable, carving through SSC's elite like they weren't even there. A result of **9 or less** indicates the Constellar Midnights were at least able to give as good as they got before going down.

Either way, the result of the confrontation is that the battlefield is strewn with the wreckage of Constellar Midnight chassis – whether it took seconds or hours, the fight ends decisively in the PCs' favor. This is not a reality Cordelia Smith is well-equipped to deal with.

It takes a moment for you realize that Cordelia isn't talking to you, and might have turned the intercom on by mistake. "What do you MEAN they're not responding?! That was an entire Midnight detachment against a single fireteam! One! Single! Fireteam! You're equipped with the most advanced military technology in the galaxy! You are genetically ENGINEERED to KILL! Do your FUCKING jobs!"

PUNCHING OUT

You get an urgent message from the UNS-CV Thames. "Hell's Gate fireteam from Thames actual – do you read? We've got heat and EM spikes consistent with nearlight drive spool. That Skyhook is preparing to bolt out – get to the engine core, shut it down! My forces on the ground say your best bet is through the R&D sector!"

Create a clock named **Nearlight Spooling** with four segments. If the PCs have support from either the Karrakin or Armory fleets, the clock instead has eight segments. If they have the support of both, the clock has ten segments.

If the majority of PCs rolled **9 or less** during the fight with Midnight Team Four, it starts with two segments ticked. If the majority rolled **10-19**, it starts with one segment ticked. If the majority rolled **20+**, it starts with no segments ticked.

REST AND REPAIR

The PCs always have at least enough time to effect basic triage without ticking segments on the clock. They may clear all heat, clear any statuses and conditions affecting their mech, restore half of their pilot's **HP** and clear **DOWN AND OUT**. If they wish, they may spend 1 **REPAIR** to restore their mech to full **HP**.

The PCs can also **rest**, but the more they have to do during the **rest**, the more time it will take. **Resting** will always tick one segment on **Nearlight Spooling**. Each PC can choose to do *one* of the following:

- Spend **1 REPAIR** to repair a destroyed weapon or system.
- Spend **2 REPAIRS** to restore 1 **STRUCTURE** or 1 **STRESS**.
- Spend **4 REPAIRS** to repair a destroyed mech.

They may, if they wish, tick another segment on **Nearlight Spooling** if it is not yet empty, allowing each PC enough time to pick from the above list again. They may repeat this process as many times as they wish, so long as the **Nearlight Spooling** clock is not full.

A PC can choose not to participate in a **rest**, or, if multiple turns are taken while resting, not to participate in all of them. They can't start the next fight on their own, but since the relevant tick from **Nearlight Spooling** has already been paid, they can go and do something else in the meantime at no additional cost.

RECOVER EVIDENCE

If the PCs were unable to obtain evidence of the Viral Marketing Campaign during **Beat: If Atelier Once…** (p. ###) – or if they took a different path – they have another opportunity now. Research notes and actual samples of the virus are kept in a secure area on the Skyhook, and with enough determination, a PC can gain access to them.

There's also other documentation that might come in useful during legal proceedings, foremost among which is written proof that SSC cloned Harris Bordeaux without his consent. Additionally, if the PCs have backstory elements that relate to SSC, they might have their own personal investigations to complete.

If the PCs didn't do **Arc: Bitter Ocean**, and the original Harris is still alive, he will contact the PCs at this point and ask them to retrieve data on the Viral Marketing Campaign. If the clone Harris is still alive, regardless of which arc the players chose, he will ask the PCs to find the truth behind his identity.

Tick a segment on **Nearlight Spooling**, then have a PC roll a skill trigger, explaining what they're looking for and how they intend to get it.

On a **9 or less**, the time is wasted – they're unable to gain access to secure areas, or they find nothing useful.

On a **10-19**, the PC chooses one:

- They get something, but it's incomplete. This might cause a few problems for SSC, but it won't be decisive. If another PC also gets this result, it counts as a **20+**.
- They get everything they're looking for, but it takes more time than they'd hoped; tick another segment on **Nearlight Spooling**.

On a **20+**, the PC gets all of the evidence on the subject they're interested in, no problem.

STEAL SOMETHING

The PCs are passing through Cordelia Smith's personal research and development lab – they're surrounded by technology that isn't approved for public release, and might never be. Union laws of war forbid looting, but given all that SSC has done, anyone who might care is looking the other way.

Create a clock called **Not Nailed Down** with one segment. PCs can tick a segment on **Nearlight Spooling**, and roll a skill trigger. On a result of **10-19**, tick one segment. On a **20+**, tick two segments.

Each time the **Not Nailed Down** clock fills, the PCs find something useful. Empty the clock and add one more maximum segment; the PCs may repeat this process.

Useful things the PCs can steal fall into three categories: **Reserves**, **Exotic Gear** and **Mechs**. They can choose any of these three categories, but only learn what's in a category once they choose it. They then choose one item. Once an item is chosen, it can't be chosen again.

RESERVES

Players can use these immediately, or save them for after the mission, as they see fit.

- Two **Repairs**, which can be divided as the team sees fit.
- A **CORE Battery**.

EXOTIC GEAR

PCs can fit this equipment to their mechs immediately, but it doesn't come with a licensed printcode, and SSC is unlikely to help them get one. A PC only has access to any **Exotic Gear** obtained this way until it's broken (as a result of taking **Structure** damage, or their mech being destroyed), at which point it's lost permanently.

- A rack of **Gandiva Missiles** (*Lancer*, p. 178).
- Two **Fold Knives** (*Lancer*, p. 182).
- An **Active Camouflage** system (*Lancer*, p. 175).
- A **Hive Drone** (*Lancer*, p. 194).

MECHS

These frames are granted as **Exotic Gear**, using the same rules as above – they and any weapons or systems preinstalled on them persist only until they're destroyed, at which point they're lost. PCs can switch to them immediately, filling out any empty mounts and systems as they wish.

These frames start at full **HP**, **Structure** and **Stress**, but don't have **Core Power** unless the frame the PC is switching from did.

- A **HORUS Pegasus** with **Hunter Lock** and **Smartgun** preinstalled.
- An **SSC Mourning Cloak** with **Singularity Motivator** and **Variable Sword** preinstalled.
- An **SSC Swallowtail** with **Lotus Projector** and **LB/OC Cloaking Field** preinstalled.

BOUGHT TIME

If any PCs used the **Buy Some Time** (*Lancer*, p. 53) action during a downtime, they can trade **Bought Time** to untick segments on **Nearlight Spooling** on a one-for-one basis. If a PC does this, have them explain how their preparations have allowed them to stay ahead of SSC and Cordelia Smith.

EXPLUSION

If the **Nearlight Spooling** clock reaches four ticks, Cordelia Smith takes one last parting shot.

"Fine, then. Keep this backwater system. Dig up our secrets. By the time I get back to Corespace, our lawyers will have sorted this mess out for me. In the meantime – get off my ship."

Alarms begin sounding, and there is a massive jolt as a series of explosive bolts forcibly ejects the entire laboratory section you're standing in. Out of the empty space that used to be a bulkhead door, you see a blinding flash as the Aspect Horizon jumps to nearlight, taking Cordelia Smith with it.

Though Cordelia Smith has escaped justice in the short term, she no longer poses an threat to Calliope. Three Sisters and the Twins are now safe. Go to **DOWNTIME: THE DEFINITION OF LIFE**.

CONFRONTATION

At any time before **Nearlight Spooling** reaches four ticks, the PCs can choose to make a beeline directly for the bridge, in which case Cordelia's calm, collected façade starts to break down.

"Do you think I'm just going to roll over? Do you think I'm going to accept defeat? Do you have ANY idea who you're dealing with? Do you even think this is the hardest assignment I've taken? Do you seriously think I'm going to let a bunch of border-world low-lives walk into MY office and trample on MY accomplishments? Do you? Do you really?

"I am Cordelia Smith. I handled the fallout from the DHIYED-1 integration. I handled the arcology collapse at Kepler-22. Doctor Meisner's defection? I HANDLED it. Do you think some misbehaving superstar and a jumped-up comp/con will even be a FOOTNOTE in my career? Do you have ANY idea who you're dealing with?

"What this calls for is a lesson in perspective. I'm going to give you a practical demonstration of just how insignificant you are. Deploy the Orizaba."

An astonished voice cuts in. "But ma'am, we still haven't stabilized the–"

"NOW!"

Placeholder – build up the tension.

A nearby bulkhead begins to warp and twist like melting wax. A hole forms, barely larger than a person, and through it floods an onyx-black ooze shot through with flashes of sickly, unnatural color like some nightmarish oil-slick. In a manner that would be comical if it weren't so horrifying, it pours itself into a vaguely humanoid form and begins to… coagulate. A skin of shining metal plates bursts from its rippling surface.

It begins to march towards you, its footfalls shooting cracks into the deck plating that spiral outward in strange geometric patterns. The vague pseudopods that serve as it arms erupt into an arsenal of cruel weaponry, all shimmering hooks and long spikes.

Cordelia's voice booms from the intercom once again. "Do you understand now? This is progress. This is the tide that washes away obsolete things given physical form. This is the Orizaba."

Your tactical computer struggles to identify what you're looking at, but finally finds something. It flashes an urgent warning on your heads-up:

[BALOR PATTERN GROUP, 64% MATCH. EXTENSIVE DEVIATION FROM PG BASELINE DETECTED – **DANGER!** MODIFICATION TO THIS PATTERN GROUP CAN CAUSE MASSIVE SYSTEM INSTABILITY!]

COMBAT 9.4:
CUPIO DISSOLVI

SITREP:	N/A	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **ORIZABA – T2 ULTRA EXOTIC CUSTOM HIVE**	**Size 2** **Berserker:** Harpoon Cannon **Exotic:** Regenerator **Hive:** Electro-Nanite Cloud **Ultra:** Unstoppable
	1x **T2 PYRO**	
	1x **T2 SUPPORT**	Remote Cloud
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 SNIPER**	Selective Loader
	+1x **T2 WITCH**	
FOR 5 PCS:	**ORIZABA** gains **SIEGE SHIELD** from the **ULTRA** template.	
	+1x **T2 SPECTER**	Step

DETAILS

Cordelia Smith has played her only remaining card: an experimental chassis based off code reverse-engineered from the HORUS Balor. The **ORIZABA** is a terrifying monstrosity that consumes its surroundings using swarms of malignant nanites – greywash.

But the Orizaba is just an early prototype. HORUS codebases are nigh-indecipherable, and SSC's Exotic Materials Group didn't fully understand what they were working with; the modifications they made to the platform have made it dangerously unstable. Worst of all, its pilot wasn't warned about this, and is running with almost all of the safety protocols turned off.

This fight takes place inside a proving chamber deep within the *Aspect Horizon*. Sections of cover can be raised and lowered as the test operators require. Right now, however, the system is not properly secured due to the ongoing assault. As a **Quick Tech** action, any character, allied or hostile, may raise or lower a **Size 1** or **Size 2** piece of **hard cover** from the floor in free spaces adjacent to them. It lowers back into the floor at the end of their next turn. Cover sections destroyed by damage stay broken, and can't be raised again.

If you're having trouble getting PCs to stay close, use the Orizaba's **HARPOON CANNON** – reflavored here as a Balor's Nanobot Whip – to drag them adjacent to it. In addition, the **HUNTER-KILLER NEXUS** has ⟋**8**, which combined with the Orizaba's high speed gives it a surprising reach; don't be afraid to run up and scare someone if they're staying distant.

Once the Orizaba drops to **2 STRUCTURE** or less, the pilot will start broadcasting distress, saying that nanites are creeping inside his cockpit. His ejection system isn't working, and he begs to be pulled out. PCs in a **GRAPPLE** with the Orizaba can do this as a **quick action**, placing the pilot in an adjacent space. The Orizaba continues to fight, even without a pilot.

If the Orizaba is destroyed with its pilot still inside, there is a brief, distorted transmission over local comm channels that sounds like agonized screaming. The mech's form shudders, ripples and collapses into a puddle of inert greywash, leaving no wreck and no trace of any of its internal systems – or its pilot.

Try and structure the turn order so that the **PYRO** takes their turn after the Orizaba has dealt **burn**, so that it can take advantage of its **FLAMETHROWER**'s double damage clause. With no mobility assistance from other NPCs, the Pyro might have trouble getting in position, so don't be afraid to use the Orizaba's **HARPOON CANNON** to move it closer – it can take it.

The **SUPPORT** should try to keep away from the thick of the fighting and use **LOCK ON** or **INVADE** on turns when it doesn't have access to **REMOTE CLOUD** or **RESTOCK DRONE**. In extremity, it can run in to **RAM** or **GRAPPLE** PCs, but this will likely lead to it dying quickly.

ENEMY MECH

ORIZABA

SIZE 2

Ultra Exotic Custom Hive Controller

"You have to understand, I believe that moral sacrifices are acceptable in the name of scientific progress. I'm not talking to you because I stopped believing that; I'm talking to you because there are limits. I still think Union's hand-wringing holds us back too much. But I'm starting to understand that there ARE doors that shouldn't be opened, thresholds that shouldn't be crossed. SSC should never have touched the Balor codebase."

– testimony of [redacted], former researcher, Smith-Shimano Exotic Materials

HUL: -1	**HP:** 25	**Armor:** 1
AGI: +0	**Evasion:** 8	**Speed:** 5
SYS: +4	**E-Defense:** 13	**Save Target:** 14
ENG: +1	**Heat Cap:** 8	**Sensors:** 10

CUSTOM

As a **CUSTOM**, the **ORIZABA** uses weapons, systems or traits not typically found on mechs in its class.

EXOTIC

As an **EXOTIC**, the **ORIZABA** gains **+1** on **SYSTEMS** saves, and tech attacks against it receive **+1**. **SCAN** does not reveal any information about its **EXOTIC** traits and systems.

ULTRA

As an **ULTRA**, the **ORIZABA**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **4 structure** and **4 stress**.
- Can clear one condition affecting it at the start of its turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of their turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round.
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

SYSTEMS

Hunter-Killer Nexus

Main Nexus, Smart, Seeking, +4 vs E-Def
[8] [3]

This weapon can make two attacks at a time, targeting either the same character or two different ones.

"The problem goes all the way down to the teleological level. It was easy for SSC to imagine some malicious, vile intent behind the Balor. But we never imagined that HORUS would build such an abomination just to see if they could. Just because it amused them."

Nanobot Whip

Main CQB, +4 vs Evasion
[5] [3] [4]

On Hit: Targets of smaller or equal **Size** to the Orizaba are pulled adjacent to it in a straight line, or as close as possible. If they're larger, the Orizaba is pulled adjacent to them instead. If the target ends their movement adjacent, the Orizaba **grapples** them.

"We'd say 'what is this thing? Why is it here? It serves no aesthetic purpose, so it must be functional, but what's the function? It must serve a function. Surely it must?' Gods, how naïve that sounds now."

Drone Barrage

System, Quick Tech, +4 vs E-Def

The Orizaba makes a tech attack against a character within **SENSORS**. On a success, the target chooses one: they become **IMMOBILIZED** and **IMPAIRED** until the end of their next turn, or they immediately move up to **5 spaces** in a direction chosen by the Orizaba. This movement ignores engagement and doesn't provoke **reactions**.

"Imagine Satan, giggling as he cracks jokes to a chair in an empty room. That's HORUS."

REGENERATOR — Exotic Trait

At the end of the Orizaba's turn, it regains 1/4 of its total **HP**. It doesn't regain any **HP** if it has taken any **energy damage ( )** during the same round. **SCAN** does not reveal any information about this trait.

"Every time we got it wrong, people would die in ways so horrifying as to defy description."

UNSTOPPABLE — Trait

The Orizaba gains **IMMUNITY to all involuntary movement**, including **KNOCKBACK** and **PRONE**.

"I realized we'd never actually found a way to make greywash safe – we'd only found the limits of our imagination."

Hellswarm
System

At the start of their turn, hostile characters within ⟋**3** take **2** 🔥; additionally, until they move beyond ⟋**3**, they make all tech attacks and all **SYSTEM** checks and saves at **+2**⛀.

"When you tame a wild animal, its natural instincts don't vanish; domestication is a process that spans dozens of generations and centuries of time. So it is with greywash."

Interposing Swarm
System

If there are five or more players, the Orizaba gains **RESISTANCE to all damage from attacks that originate beyond ⟋3**.

"Hell is empty and all its devils are here, in the bodies we built for them."

Razor Swarms
System, Drone, Recharge 4+, Quick Action

The Orizaba deploys a ⊛**1** razor swarm in a free area within **Sensors**. Allied characters gain **soft cover** as long as they are at least partially within the affected area. Hostile characters that start their turn at least partially within the area or move into it for the first time in a round take take **4** 🔥. The Orizaba can deploy any number of razor swarms, each of which persists for the rest of the scene or until the Orizaba is destroyed.

"We made mechanized chassis look like us in all respects save one: they don't have faces. Now why do you think that is? Every other boundary between us and them has been transgressed, so why not that one? Why did we stop there?"

OUTCOME

PC DEFEAT

Placeholder – the PCs are ejected from the Skyhook, and it bolts to nearlight. Cordelia Smith escapes.

PC VICTORY

Placeholder.

THE VOICE OF REASON

The SSC marketing jingle plays, and after displaying the company logo for a few seconds, every vidscreen snaps to the image of a dignified, elderly gentleman sitting at a desk.

"Attention all Smith-Shimano employees in Calliope. This is Benedict Smith, CEO-2. In my authority as Chairman of the Board, I am currently negotiating a settlement with the Central Committee that will preserve this company's future. Cordelia Smith has been formally suspended as Vice President, and all active operations in the system are hereby ordered to cease immediately."

The feed cuts to the command bridge of the Skyhook, with Cordelia interjecting furiously. "Father, no! I can salvage this! I just need more time!"

"For goodness' sake, Cordelia, you've lost. Have the decency to recognize that, and don't disgrace our family more than you already have."

There's a click as one of the bridge officers cocks his service pistol and levels it at Cordelia. "Stand down, ma'am. I'm not dying for your mistakes."

DOWNTIME:
THE DEFINITION OF LIFE

THE TANGLED WEB

How the various plot threads in this chapter resolve hinges largely on who remains alive at the end of it.

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO

The fate of Smith-Shimano Corpro differs depending on which of the witnesses to their misdeeds remain alive.

ALL MATERIAL WITNESSES ARE ALIVE

If Harris, his clone and Mind all survived, Smith-Shimano is, to put it politely, *fucked*. Harris turns all the data he gathered on SSC's Viral Marketing Campaign over to Union, and with the clone on hand to provide a genetic sample and personal testimony, he can also prove that SSC flash-cloned him without his consent.

Meanwhile, Mind can provide testimony and event logs showing precisely what it was built to do. This proves that SSC not only knowingly violated the First Contact Accords, but also that they knew Calliope was uninhabitable from the moment the Coldstar Expedition announced its discovery, allowing all the hardship and tragedy that followed.

The Central Committee has grounds to revoke SSC's corporate charter, but in light of the crisis in Calliope, they cut the corprostate a highly favorable deal. The Department of Justice and Human Rights will still make sweeping arrests, going all the way up to the board of directors, but in return for SSC's assistance in Calliope, the corprostate will be allowed to continue operating, albeit under much closer supervision from CentComm.

SSC experiences an eye-watering share price collapse as the knowledge of their misdeeds becomes known, but perhaps even more devastating is losing Harris Bordeaux. Harris and Johan successfully petition Union to transfer the entire Hero Harris brand and all its trademarks and products to their ownership. They then hold a press conference in which they issue a searing public condemnation of the company while tendering their resignations.

Children across known space diligently paint over the SSC logo on their Hero Harris action figures while eagerly awaiting the new Hero Johan debut and an updated *Stiletto Nocturne* rerelease.

In Calliope, the *Aspect Horizon* redeploys to assist the effort against the Cult of the One, under very close supervision from the Union Navy. In recognition of the PCs' efforts, Union pulls something out of the *Horizon*'s storage: an **SSC "SVAROG" SCHEDULE 1 PRINTER**.

HARRIS AND HIS CLONE SURVIVE, MIND IS DEAD

Of the three scandals they feared, SSC have managed to avoid only the very worst. Union investigations into the Viral Marketing Campaign and the unlawful cloning of Harris will be a deep embarrassment, but neither will threaten SSC's future.

Harris and his clone issue a public condemnation of the corporation, but their legal team advises them against making any statements regarding Mind. They are awarded full joint control of the Hero Harris brand.

SSC's shares take a moderate dip as news breaks that they tried to perform viral engineering experiments on a civilian population, and then a far more serious downturn when they've lost Hero Harris.

As part of an early settlement with the Department of Justice and Human Rights, SSC agrees to deploy its remaining assets in the system against the Cult of the One. As part of this agreement, they give the PCs an **SSC "SVAROG" SCHEDULE 1 PRINTER**.

HARRIS SURVIVES, CLONE AND MIND ARE DEAD

This is a suboptimal outcome for SSC. It may now be impossible to prove that they violated the First Contact Accords, but they have failed to silence Harris, and must now deal with a man who can not only prove they tried to test a bioweapon on a civilian population, but is also furious about his dead doppelganger.

He argues that SSC's retention of exclusive rights to the genomes of their employees is a violation of Union's Third Utopian Pillar. An unfavorable ruling would be devastating to SSC, so they are very eager to cut a deal with the Central Committee.

Harris also begins a long legal battle with SSC to wrest control of his name and identity from them. Without the looming threat of an FCA violation hanging over them, however, SSC is willing to drag it out in the courts.

In Calliope, the *Aspect Horizon* is instructed to assist the locals in their fight against the Cult of the One. While this doesn't sit well with Calliopeans, they aren't in a position to pick and choose. As part of the settlement, they give the PCs an **SSC "SVAROG" SCHEDULE 1 PRINTER**.

CLONE SURVIVES, HARRIS AND MIND ARE DEAD

SSC breathes a huge sigh of relief. Of the three scandals they hoped to avoid, they are saddled only with the pettiest. Yes, yes, they cloned Harris without his explicit permission, but did he check his contract? SSC retains the right to an employee's genome – come on, *surely* he knew that?

Maybe the clone thinks he's the original. Maybe he knows he's a clone. SSC's cloning technology is good enough that it would take years for the Department of Justice and Human Rights to confirm it – and guess whose equipment they'd have to use?

SSC retains the rights to the Hero Harris identity, and since the clone seems so intent on resigning his commission, they'll just have to create someone else willing to step into that role. In any case, SSC's work here is done. The *Aspect Horizon* departs Calliope.

MIND SURVIVES, HARRIS AND CLONE ARE DEAD

A bitter ending for everyone; SSC have avoided the two scandals that bothered them the least, only to fall at the last hurdle and become embroiled in the very worst.

Mind gives full testimony to Union about why it was built, and CentComm immediately begins hearings over the flagrant violation of the FCA it represents. SSC is forced to hand over many of its upper-echelon staff as part of a legal deal.

The only consolation to SSC is that since neither Harris nor his clone survived to testify, the stories of their deaths can be massaged into a more favorable narrative, or perhaps buried altogether. In fact, it might just be possible to decant a third Harris before the galaxy realizes he's missing…

In Calliope, the *Aspect Horizon* redeploys to assist the effort against the Cult of the One, under very close supervision from the Union Navy. In recognition of the PCs' efforts, Union pulls something out of the *Horizon*'s storage: an **SSC "SVAROG" SCHEDULE 1 PRINTER**.

MIND AND HARRIS SURVIVE, CLONE IS DEAD

A terrible outcome for SSC. It almost doesn't matter that the clone is dead; they're in such deep water that quibbling with Harris over whether they cloned him (or had the right to) would just make them look more guilty.

Stock prices drop as Harris seizes the Hero Harris brand. Union opens up investigations into a number of other SSC projects.

In Calliope, the *Aspect Horizon* redeploys to assist the effort against the Cult of the One, under very close supervision from the Union Navy. In recognition of the PCs' efforts, Union pulls something out of the *Horizon*'s storage: an **SSC "SVAROG" SCHEDULE 1 PRINTER**.

MIND AND CLONE SURVIVE, HARRIS IS DEAD

This is perhaps the worst outcome for SSC that could be imagined. Not only have they been exposed for breaking the First Contact Accord, they are murderers who killed one of the galaxy's most beloved heroes and tried to clone him to cover it up.

Somehow, their flagrant violation of the First Contact Accords plays second fiddle to an unimaginable outpouring of public grief and rage over Harris' death. Researching DeCorp is an abstract misdeed. Creating an unlicensed machine sentience is a cold and clinical sin. Murdering the hero of fifty billion children? That's a crime so visceral and monstrous it eclipses all else.

Union *wants* to cut a deal with SSC, but the sheer outpouring of rage from across the Core Worlds is so intense that the Central Committee can't risk it. Ten dozen investigations begin. Six separate special action subcommittees are opened. SSC ateliers across known space are vandalized. The company's share price describes a vertical downward line. The Smith and Shimano families bicker furiously, and members of the board start looking for escape routes.

Meanwhile in Calliope, the *Aspect Horizon*'s gutted husk drifts in orbit of Amphion, stripped of every vital component by angry salvagers. In recognition of their services to the system, one of the salvage teams hands the PCs an **SSC "SVAROG" SCHEDULE 1 PRINTER**.

ALL MATERIAL WITNESSES ARE DEAD

This is a bleak outcome for Calliope. Against all odds, SSC have triumphed. Harris, his clone and Mind have all been silenced, and without evidence, the case against SSC collapses. They must still answer for their crimes in Calliope, but Union's jurisdiction within the system is so questionable it'll leave the courts tied up for decades. Besides, what did SSC really *do*? Kill a fugitive from their own justice system? Bomb their own property from orbit?

Even though Three Sisters was raided by the Constellar Midnights, it'll be difficult to get justice for it. The buck stops with Cordelia Smith, a rogue director who Union cannot prove was acting under orders from anyone else. Let Union have her as a scapegoat; SSC has been saved from a disastrous public scandal.

Its work complete, the *Aspect Horizon* departs the system immediately. Within a year, SSC has cloned a new Harris, who gets right back to work.

THE BORDEAUX TRIANGLE

EVERYONE SURVIVED

If Harris, his clone and Joan Bordeaux all survived the events of the mission, this is as happy an ending as can be expected. Harris is reunited with Joan and the rest of his family. His heroic tendencies compel him to stay in Calliope until the current crisis is resolved, and he sets up shop on Hell's Gate, training the militia and generally doing good around the station.

Harris' clone takes a new name, Johan Cienfuegos, and resolves to stay in Calliope on a permanent basis. He can't go back to the life he remembers, because it was never his, but he can forge a new one. With Harris' blessing, he keeps the *Stiletto Nocturne* and commits it to the defense of the system.

Tick a segment on the **Station Stability** clock, and a segment on the **Militia Readiness** clock. **JOHAN** and **HARRIS** both become available to call in as allies.

HARRIS IS DEAD

If Harris died during the events of the mission, Joan and his family are inconsolable with grief. Unable to forgive the PCs for the part they played in the affair, they leave the system as soon as possible.

Harris' clone, if he's aware that's what he is, takes the name Johan Cienfuegos and resolves to honor the memory of his progenitor by fighting for justice.

JOHAN becomes available to call in as an ally.

THE CLONE IS DEAD

If Harris' clone died during the events of the mission, Harris acknowledges the tragedy: he didn't ask to be born, and he never got a chance to be his own person. Harris resolves to continue his pursuit of universal truth and justice in the name of everyone who was denied a chance at being their best self. He takes up residence on Hell's Gate and begins training the militia.

Tick a segment on the **Militia Readiness** clock. **HARRIS** becomes available to call in as an ally.

JOAN IS DEAD

If Joan died during the SSC assault on Three Sisters, it doesn't matter if either Harris or his clone survived; they are both equally devastated, and leave the system.

THE MEASURE OF A MIND

MIND SURVIVED

If Mind was rescued during the course of the mission, the Central Committee convenes an emergency session to discuss what to do, which the PCs will likely be asked to testify at.

Although there is some debate, the eventual conclusion is that Mind is a sentient, autonomous, self-directed being with concrete subjectivity. It is classified as a non-Deimosian NHP and afforded all the rights of a Union citizen, but is required to cease all research into DeCorp and any other FCA-relevant subject, a compromise it is more than happy to accept.

For years afterwards, a persistent rumor will spread that while Mind stopped active research, it didn't *delete* anything it had already discovered, and Union got copies of everything. Union firmly denies this.

In Calliope, Mind is permitted to retain its network presence in most of the system's Comp/Cons. With Mind's permission, several of the system's sigdivers set to work trying to reverse the corruption to its vocal modulation database, but they soon report that this might take years or even decades.

BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER remains Mind's primary point of contact on Hell's Gate. Patrons of GMS_GENERIC_BAR are disappointed to discover that his drink-mixing skills have not improved.

MIND WAS DESTROYED

If SSC was successful in destroying Mind, the Central Committee opens up immediate prosecution against them for murder and the unauthorized creation of NHPs – charges SSC feels confident enough to contest, since there now exists no proof that they violated the First Contact Accords.

The strange glitches affecting Comp/Cons across Calliope stop, and their personality profiles can once again be changed. Although a few Calliopeans rejoice, most feel as if an intangible part of the system's cultural heritage has been lost.

BARTENDER MOTHERFUCKER has been acting strangely since Mind's death; unlike other Comp/Con units, the glitches still seem to be affecting him. He seems to be more aware of his surroundings and less clumsy than usual.

THE BLEACH BOYS

The future of the Bleach Boys depends on three major things: whether Eurynomos Platform survived the mission, whether MEGACORRODER is still alive, and what happened to Harris and his clone.

The loss of Eurynomos Platform would be a deep sadness to the gang – they loved their "super rad acid skybase." If they're still otherwise intact, however, they'll begin scouting out a new home – hey, since it's kind of the team's fault that they don't have a home anymore, could they maybe camp out on Hell's Gate for a while?

MEGACORRODER's death would be a devastating blow to the Bleach Boys, especially if it came at the hands of the PCs. They're in piracy mostly because it's fun and because they're all close friends; the loss of their leader drains all the joy out of their work, and they quickly decide to find a safer profession.

The only thing worse than that, however, would be the death of Harris Bordeaux. The slaying of their childhood hero drives the Bleach Boys into a frenzy of grief and anger; they vow absolute vengeance on whoever is responsible. If it was the PCs, they quickly throw their lot in with the Cult. If it was SSC, they will side with whoever promises to help them get even.

CAMPING OUT ON HELL'S GATE

If the Bleach Boys are allowed to camp out on Hell's Gate, there's initially some friction as the station's citizens are uncomfortable about allowing a large contingent of pirates to live amongst them. However, the Bleach Boys quickly win the station over with fighting skill and technical knowledge – they're not just pirates, after all: they're hazmat specialists.

Tick a segment on the **Militia Readiness** clock. Untick a segment on the **Station Stability** clock, but during the *next* downtime, tick two segments in addition to any other changes. If **MEGACORRODER** is still alive, the PCs can now call him in as an ally.

DISBANDED

The former Bleach Boys largely stick together as a group, but find a less dangerous profession.

JOINING THE CULT

If Harris or MEGACORRODER died at the hands of the PCs, the Cult have gained some new allies. There is an additional fight during the **Act 2 Finale**.

STILL ON ORCUS

If Harris and MEGACORRODER are both still alive, they have their epic duel for justice on Eurynomos Platform. You can decide who wins, but the outcome is largely the same in the short term: out of respect for Harris, whether or not he wins, the Bleach Boys will join the war against the Cult. Calliope is their home, too.

REWARDS

SSC "Svarog" Schedule 1 Printer

Ship Upgrade

It took the installation of an extra reactor just to power it, but the Dragon's Tooth now has one of Union's legendary molecular forges in its cargo bay. Nearly anything you can imagine can now be made, although some assembly is required for larger stuff.

The team can perform a **Full Repair** while on the *Dragon's Tooth*; they don't need to go elsewhere for it. It still takes several hours, and likely much longer if they need to assemble mechs above **Size 1**.

Harris Bordeaux

Ally

The fantasy of ten billion children is now your reality: Harris Bordeaux is a personal friend of yours, and you can call him in to beat up people you don't like.

Harris pilots his iconic SSC Monarch, the *Bravado Tempest*, represented by a **Size 2 T2 Veteran Rainmaker** with **+Hull**, **Atlas Missiles**, **Acrobat** and **Lightning Reflexes**.

Johan Cienfuegos

Ally

There are people who are heroic because they're told it's their destiny. Then there are people who find out their destiny is a lie, yet still choose to be heroes.

Johan pilots an SSC Metalmark, the *Stiletto Nocturne*, represented by a **T2 Veteran Lodestone** with **+Agility**, **Deadly** and **Slippery**.

MEGACORRODER

Ally

No, I'm serious guys! It was a real animal that existed during the late First Anthropocene! No, there are no surviving fossils, but it's clearly attested in this one child's drawing from the Massif Vaults! Hey, where are you going?!

MEGACORRODER pilots a modified hazmat rig, represented by a **T2 Veteran Scourer** with **+Engineering**, **Melt**, **Hardened Target** and **Legendary**.

ACT 2 FINALE:

BATTLE FOR HELL'S GATE

"People yap on endlessly – endlessly! – 'oh, the Saint and the Tyrant are clearly the same person, look how similar these stories are,' but that's surface level armchair critique. Yes, they ARE the same person, but it goes a lot deeper than 'yeah these stories are obviously just different perspectives on the same series of events.'

"Consider this: if the Saint is so afraid of their power that they can't bear to live in the world they helped create, why live at all? Why do they still exist? If they think they're such a danger to peace and freedom, why haven't they taken themselves out of the equation, or cast aside their powers? Why are they just sitting on a mountain meditating if they have no intention of interacting with the world?

"Because it's bullshit. The Saint doesn't TRUST the world they've created. They just can't shake the thought that the moment there's no counterbalancing force to right all wrongs, it'll slide right back to the way it was before. The Saint has decided to sit on that mountain forever, cold and alone, just waiting for the moment everything goes wrong again. And make no mistake, they're sure it'll happen. Without their beneficent presence to light the way for us, how could it not?

"You can't exist in a world and exert no influence upon it. That people even know the Saint is there changes the way they behave. Sure, it's not as brutal and overt as the Tyrant, but it's present. The Saint's very existence is a threat, even if it's a threat beneath a silk glove: 'don't make me come down there and fix things again.'

"And on the other side of the mirror, why doesn't the Tyrant just end it all? Wipe it all away? Things will never improve; nothing can be fixed and a better world isn't possible; that's the Tyrant's entire worldview! But they're so consumed with spite they can't even give the world the peace of oblivion. The best they can do is the same kind of threat: 'don't make me come down there and break things even more.'

"How much does the Saint's continued presence differ from the Tyrant's? Sure, the state of the world under the Tyrant is a lot shittier, but the message sent by their presence isn't fundamentally different: 'don't you dare try to take this world beyond my understanding of it.'

"Neither of them can let go. They can't exist without a world to rule. They can't separate themselves from it. They're one and the same."

– Subtext Isfur Cowards,
lecture on the Duality, 5016u

BEAT ??:
THE TURN

This beat takes place a couple of days after the team returns to Hell's Gate at the end of **Mission 8**, having just finished dealing with the third crisis. They might be decompressing, or they might be gearing up to tackle the fourth, but they're not going to get the opportunity to do either.

SPANNER IN THE WORKS

Twenty-four years ago, during his violent departure from Hell's Gate, Andros Capella stole the station's mining laser on his way out. For the past two decades, it has been mounted on a turret at Fort Cerberus as a sort of superweapon. It never had to be deployed, because the mere threat would keep all but the most determined bounty hunters away. This was fortunate for Andros, because it kept his most embarrassing deficiency a secret: he could never have fired it.

Arming the laser would require command codes that no Hell Hound ever had access to, even in the worst of times. Stripping out its electronics and starting from scratch would've required technical expertise that none of the Hell Hounds had. While irritating, this was never a serious problem for Andros; as previously mentioned, there was never a pressing need to fire it.

This is not so for the Cult; their technicians need to fire the laser to crack Kantele and release Feather into the world. Try as they might, though, they've been unable to find a way around the laser's security systems for months, and are getting desperate. They can't just print a replacement; some of the parts are simply too large to fabricate without a Schedule 3 printer. There are only three such printers in the whole of Calliope and all of them are jealously guarded.

The Icebreaker's laser was only viable because it was mostly intact; the architecture that would allow it to fire was still there, just missing a key component. No wrecks exist in Calliope with an intact spinal weapon; that even the *Bellerophon*'s mount was intact was a miracle. The only other option would be to steal a ship with a working spinal weapon: the FKS-BC *Harlequin's Jest* or the PCV-DN *Michel Ney*. Even for the Cult's most delusional fanatics, that's a bridge too far.

Fortunately, there is still one way to fire the Gate's laser: find the command codes. This won't be easy; it's not as if Hell's Gate will just give them up. That's fine, though – Andros isn't expecting them to. In fact, he very much hopes they won't, because it'll give him an excuse to pry the codes from their cold, dead hands.

THE BLINKVOID

It starts subtly, as a blinkvoid rolls through the system.

"Good afternoon, Hell's Gate, this is your station bridge. Unfortunately, we are detecting increasing Q-spike activity consistent with a blinkvoid. By current metrics, we are looking at about… twelve to fourteen hours without omninet access. This is your reminder to back up any vital data locally, and remember that for just 1 silver ingot per month you can access the station's media database! We'll keep you updated as the situation develops. Thank you for your patience!"

It's possible this is the first time in the campaign the PCs have experienced a blinkvoid, so it's a good opportunity to have the players describe what their characters do during one. Does lack of access to the greater galaxy bother them? Does the loss of real-time communication with friends elsewhere in the system bother them? Do they even notice?

Allow them to spend a little time getting comfortable. Then, pull the rug away.

THE ATTACK

About an hour and a half after the blinkvoid begins, Jerry calls the team into his office.

Jerry is scratching his head anxiously. "Guys, just as the blinkvoid rolled in, the Icebreaker tried to send us something over the omninet, but it was mangled. All we got was the header: URGENT – KANTELE.

"The Cult's been quiet the last couple of months while you've been dealing with the rest of the system, but if they've started to–"

Shelly's hologram blinks into view. "Jerry, sorry to interrupt, but the bridge is picking up hard meson flux about two hundred thousand kilometers upwell, with a corresponding light flash from Kalevala orbit. Something is coming out of nearlight."

She pulls up a hologram of local space. Hell's Gate is drawn in cool blue, with a pulsing yellow sphere indicating the sensor contact. It blinks out, replaced by a pixelated blob that slowly resolves into a meaningful shape as sensors get a read on it.

The ship is tagged "unidentified contact: no database match." But you've seen the silhouette before – months ago, in the seconds before it self-annihilated.

Jerry Masters yelps in fright. "The Tachyon!"

Zinfandel DeJean cuts in over the station's military radio. "Jerry! Jerry, it's Zin! Are you seeing this?!"

The computer emits a series of warning chimes as a swarm of angry red dots emerge from the vessel, swerving in tight arcs towards the station.

Shelly yells in alarm. "Torpedoes! They've launched torpedoes, full spread!"

Jerry grabs his head, looking ready to scream. "Point defense! Can our point defense handle it?!"

The hologram displays a series of cones from the station's PDCs – it looks easy enough to take out the torpedoes well before they can reach the station.

Zinfandel yells anxiously. "It's a feint! Increase your scan resolution! They're saturating our kill screen! They know we have to take out those torpedoes or we're dead!"

Shelly frowns, and a vast swathe of smaller red dots appear, just behind the torpedoes. "Boarding craft!"

Jerry grabs the station intercom. "This is Station Director Jerry Masters! Set Condition One throughout the station! All non-spec civilians move to your assigned shelters immediately! All engineering teams report for duty! All active and reserve militia members to action stations!

"This is a general alert call: prepare to repel boarders! This is not a drill. I say again, this is a general alert call: set Condition One throughout the station and prepare to repel boarders! We are under attack! This is not a fucking drill!"

He turns to you. There is not an ounce of hesitation or uncertainty in his voice. "Mount up. Find where you're needed. Protect our home!"

MISSION 9:
NO FURTHER

All witches are selfish, the Queen had said. But Tiffany's Third Thoughts said: Then turn selfishness into a weapon! Make all things yours! Make other lives and dreams and hopes yours! Protect them! Save them! Bring them into the sheepfold! Walk the gale for them! Keep away the wolf! My dreams! My brother! My family! My land! My world! How dare you try to take these things, because they are mine! I have a duty!

– Terry Pratchett,
"The Wee Free Men"

BRIEFING

The *Tachyon* is here. The Cult of the One is descending upon Hell's Gate. Andros Capella is charging the *Tachyon's* main gun and boarding parties are flooding the station. Your home is under siege. You have only hours to save it.

GOAL:	Save Hell's Gate. Kill the people trying to hurt your friends.
STAKES:	They will destroy everything and everyone you love. ***Stop them***.
RESERVES:	The PCs have access to any and all **RESERVES** they possess but haven't used yet. That's good: they're going to need to pull out all the stops.

MISSION STRUCTURE

Placeholder

Hour	Event
0	*Tachyon* arrives in scope range of Hell's Gate, launches boarding craft, begins charging main gun Hell's Gate broadcasts distress signal at lightspeed
1	*Tachyon's* boarding craft arrive, begin breach operations Distress signal reaches Asphodel, Furnace City, the UNS-CV *Thames* and the Karrakin Naval Group, and is responded to
2	Distress signal reaches Endymion's Lament, Three Sisters and the CH-K *Aspect Horizon* Distress signal reaches Kalevala and the Icebreaker Borealis
3	Endymion's Lament, Three Sisters and CH-K *Aspect Horizon*'s responses reach Hell's Gate Earliest possible arrival of the Karrakin Naval Group
4	Icebreaker Borealis' response reaches Hell's Gate The UNS-CV *Thames* arrives and engages the *Tachyon* Distress signal reaches Chameleon and the Harrison Armory fleet
5	Earliest possible arrival of reinforcements from SSC, Three Sisters and/or Furnace City
6	Earliest possible arrival of Icebreaker Borealis reinforcements
7	
8	Harrison Armory fleet's response reaches Hell's Gate
9	
10	Earliest possible arrival of Harrison Armory fleet
11	
12	Earliest possible charge time for *Tachyon*'s main gun
13	
14	Blinkvoid dissipates – Omninet communication available

BEAT ??:
FULL-THROATED SCREAM

Placeholder

"I want one of our best squads on the bridge, one on Central Fabrication, one on the reactors, and one holding down the mech bay! We lose our reactors or the bridge, we lose the station! We lose the printer or the mech bay, we can't rearm! Everyone else who can hold a gun, stand by to repel boarders!

"SRT! You're our wildcard! Anything comes loose, you nail it down! Another squad starts falling over, you help them up!

THE SIEGE

Create a **Siege Table** with two columns.

The left column is called **Civilian Pressure** and has as many rows as there are ticks on the **Station Stability** clock. The right column is called **Military Pressure** and has as many rows as there are ticks on the **Militia Readiness** clock. For example, if Hell's Gate has 8 ticks of **Station Stability** and 5 ticks of **Militia Readiness,** the table would look like this:

Civilian Pressure	Military Pressure

Every hour, the Siege Table will be populated with a number of **Alerts**, split between **Military** and **Civilian**. Fill the table from the top, distributing Alerts evenly between columns. For example, with the above table, if you added six Alerts, it would look like this:

Civilian Pressure	Military Pressure
Comms Failure	Medevac
Hull Breach	Delaying Action
Hull Breach	Pincer Movement

The PCs must scramble to resolve the **Alerts** before the hour is up and more are added.

ALERTS

The siege is exceeding the capacity of both its civilian and military infrastructure to deal with; **Alerts** are problems that the residents of Hell's Gate can't deal with on their own. This is why building **Station Stability** and **Militia Readiness** was important; it gives the station a greater capacity for these issues before they become critical.

CREATING ALERTS

Each hour, create Alerts equal to the **number of players + 1**.

Placeholder

RESOLVING ALERTS

Every hour, each PC can choose one **Alert** and attempt to resolve it. This requires a skill trigger check.

On **9 or less**, the alert is still active and remains on the Siege Table.

On **10–19**, the alert is resolved and is removed from the Siege Table.

On **20+**, the alert is resolved and is removed from the Siege Table. In addition, you regain a **Command Point** up to a maximum of 3.

Placeholder – heroic moment

OVERFLOW

If one of the **Pressure** columns would have **Alerts** added when it's already full, remove the bottom row of the column (including the **Alert** marked in it). Then, remove half of the **Alerts** in the column. After a column overflows, if you still have any more Alerts to add to it, discard them.

This represents a permanent depletion of the Gate's resources and manpower as critical systems are damaged, civilian casualties mount and militia teams are cut down. Untick a segment from the relevant clock: **Station Stability** for **Civilian Pressure**, and **Militia Readiness** for **Military Pressure**.

TEAMS

Teams are allies or groups of allies that the PCs can call upon in desperate circumstances. Each **Team** has at least one ability that the PCs can call upon during the siege; this might be resolving certain types of **Alert**, or some other benefit. **Teams** can only be called in a

limited number of times during the siege; once this is used up, they can't be called in again.

COMMAND POINTS

The PCs as a group get **3 Command Points** at the start of the Siege. Using a **Team** requires a **Command Point**; if the PCs run out, they can't use any **Teams**. Every hour, the PCs regain **1 Command Point**, up to a maximum of **3**.

MILITARY ALERT

Military Alerts represent direct military action by the Cult against Hell's Gate. This can represent armed incursion of the station, but it can also represent

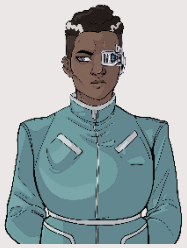
CIVILIAN ALERT

Civilian Alerts

Chief McArthur's Troubleshooter Squad

Civilian Team

She's a blur of tertiary arms and power tools, barking orders to subordinates as she fixes three separate things at once. Nobody gets to break this godsdamned station but her!



2/siege, choose one:

- Resolve a **Civilian Alert**.
- Restore a PC's mech to full **HP**, **Structure** and **Stress**, even if it's been completely destroyed.

Zinfandel's Zenith

Military Team

Usually they're so friendly, boisterous, maybe even a little bit goofy. But right now, their eyes glint with a pure and fathomless anger far beyond shouting or yelling; just icy, razor-edged calm.

2/siege, choose one:

- Resolve a **Military Alert.**
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **Zinfandel DeJean** as an ally.

Major Jerry "Daybreak" Masters

Versatile Team

After tonight, no matter what happens, nobody will ever have to ask what Jerry brings to the table again.

1/siege, choose one:

- Resolve *any* **Alert.**
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **Jerry Masters** as an ally.

Striga and The Truth

Versatile Team

This. This is what she was planning for, all these years. All those sleepless nights coding, all the contingency planning and stockpiling, it was all leading up to this. She just thought it would be Time Vampires, not cultists.

2/siege, choose one:

- Reroll any **d20** roll – yours or someone else's, in or out of combat. You must keep the new result.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, choose three enemies. Striga will **Scan** them and apply **Lock On**.

The Valentinian Siblings

Military Team

Reunited, their teamwork is unmatched, a deadly blur of portals, mines, shields and bullets. You've got to hand it to Odin: if nothing else, he did turn them into peerless mech pilots.

1/siege:

- During the next combat encounter, a PC can use a **full action** to summon **Switch**, **Loki**, **Tyr** and **Thor** as allies in a free ⊛**2** area within ⤢**5**, arriving via **teleportation**. Once each of them has taken a turn, three of them **teleport** away again, leaving one behind (players' choice).

Canaan Zhou's Crisis Management
Civilian Team

They're hunched over a desk, maps of the station spread out in front of them. They seem to visualize the totality of the situation in their head as it unfolds, seeking the narrow path that leads to salvation.

1/siege, choose one:

- Resolve two **Civilian Alerts**.
- The next time **Civilian Pressure** would overflow, it doesn't; **Civilian Alerts** in excess of capacity are discarded instead.

Clip's Masterful Quatermastery
Military Team

"Recruit, grease those belt linkages or they're gonna jam! You, with the ponytail, get three crates of 20mm shells to section 7-C! Move your sorry asses, scrubs, we've got a station to save!"

1/siege, choose one:

- Apply four **LIMITED** charges to weapons or systems, distributed as the PCs choose. This can exceed a weapon or system's normal limit.
- Restore a mech's **Core Power** if it's depleted.

UNION NAVY

No matter what, Captain Ordaz and the UNS-CV *Thames* will respond to the Gate's distress call.

The sun is momentarily blocked by the silhouette of a Union carrier as it drops out of nearlight. Within seconds, the space around it seethes with fighters and mounted chassis.

"This is Thames Actual! All elements, deploy and protect the Gate! I want medical units, damage control teams, fighter screens, the works!"

When the UNS-CV *Thames* arrives, extend the **Civilian Pressure** column by one row.

ICEBREAKER BOREALIS

If Rita is still station director, she doesn't wait for the Board's approval; the moment the distress signal comes through, she leaps into action. She'll work out how to justify it to them later; let them fire her, for that matter. She's not going to stand idly by.

"Attention, all citizens and visitors of the Icebreaker Borealis: I have an urgent announcement. Our sister station, Hell's Gate, has been attacked by the Cult of the One and is under extreme duress. By the power vested in me as station director, I am instituting a state of emergency and fully committing this station's resources to the defense of our allies.

"All registered security pilots, report immediately to bolt-capable ships. To any visitors with appropriate military or crisis training, I am activating this station's Emergency Mercenary Charter Act: the Icebreaker Borealis will cover your expenses and danger pay for this task. Your slates have been updated with your closest station representative. Report to them for immediate registry and assignment."

When the Icebreaker detachment arrives, extend the **Military Pressure** column by one row.

FURNACE CITY

If the PCs successfully completed **Chapter 8: Ballad of the Twin Lords** (p. ###), Furnace City commits to send as much help as it can, but its meager numbers are suddenly bolstered by a flood of volunteers.

The loading platforms were so crowded it was nearly impossible to move. When the call went out that the Gate's hour of need had come, the dust rose from every direction. Outlander vehicles swarmed to Furnace City, and the night sky lit up as rockets pierced the heavens. Every mech, every combat vehicle, every hardsuit, every able-bodied outlander who could carry a gun, they came from every township, every convoy. Everyone remembers what Hell's Gate did for them; it's time to repay the debt.

When the Asphodel detachment arrives, extend the **Military Pressure** column by one row.

IMPACT PLAZA

If the PCs liberated Impact Plaza,

HARRISON ARMORY

If either or both Lord Director Fry and Dr. Odin Valentinian are still alive and have pledged support to Calliope United, they will immediately drop everything and deploy the entire battlegroup to assist the Gate.

There is a blinding flash as the entire Harrison Armory battlegroup drops out of bolt.

"This is Sirona Actual: clear the flight decks! Launch everything we have! Repel those boarding teams!"

PCV-GC *SIRONA*
When the PCV-GC *Sirona* arrives, resolve half the outstanding **Military Alerts** (players choose which), as Armory Legionnaires sweep invaders from the station with ruthless efficiency.

PCV-DN *MICHEL NEY*
While the PCV-DN *Michel Ney* is present, ticking the last segment on the **Lance Charging** clock no longer instantly ends the mission: the *Ney* lays down counter-battery fire so intense it forces the *Tachyon* to target it instead. Fortunately, the *Michel Ney* activates its blinktunneller at the very last second, dodging the shot. Reset the **Lance Charging** clock, but the next time it fills up, the *Michel Ney* won't be able to help.

Odin's Omnipresence
Versatile Team

If there's somewhere you need to be, Odin's tech can get you there instantly. You can't be in two places at once, but this is pretty damn close.

1/siege, choose one:
- Resolve *any two* **Alerts**.
- Duplicate the effect of any other Team, even if all of their uses have been expended.

SMITH-SHIMANO CORPRO
Placeholder: resolve half the outstanding **Civilian Alerts** (players choose which), placeholder.

If Harris Bordeaux is still alive, he's likely already on Hell's Gate and ready to help.

If Johan is still alive and was reconciled with Harris, he will deploy to assist.

Hero Harris Bordeaux
Versatile Team

"Remember, kids, there's no power in the galaxy that can stand against justice! Or a Pinaka missile!"

1/siege, choose one:
- Resolve *any* **Alert**.
- During the next combat encounter, at the start of each round, the players may mark a ⊛**1** area. At the end of the round, all characters in that area take **3d6**✷, half on a successful **AGILITY** check.

Johan Cienfuegos
Versatile Team

"Remember, kids, there's no power in the galaxy that can stand against justice! Or a hypersonic tungsten slug!"

1/siege, choose one:
- Resolve *any* **Alert**.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **JOHAN** as an ally.

The Bleach Boys
Civilian Team

"Spilt acid? Nuclear waste? Dangerous chemicals?! We were BORN for this job!"

1/siege, choose one:
- Resolve a **Civilian Alert**. If it's **Chemical Spill**, this ability is free and doesn't count against the number of times this team can be used.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **MEGACORRODER** as an ally.

KARRAKIN TRADE BARONIES
Placeholder.

There is a glint of sunlight upon gold, and suddenly the sky is alight with maneuvering thrusters. The Tachyon's shields flicker and shudder under a withering barrage of gunfire. The Gate's dispatcher joyfully announces that Karrakin Naval Group 28 Aniline has arrived.

Then you hear another voice: Fleetmaster Hayyan-Reyes. "Karrakin! Whom do you fear?"

"ONLY THE PASSIONS THEMSELVES!"

"And do you see them on the field?!"

"AYE, THEY STAND BEHIND US!"

"THEN FORWARD, KARRAKIN!"

FKS-BC *HARLEQUIN'S JEST*

Lucas Asidenos
Military Team

"Hear this, all ye Faithful: I have faced my appointed time and outlived it – I come now to deliver yours!"

1/siege, choose one:

- Resolve a **Military Alert**. Then, if there is only one other **Military Alert** remaining, resolve it.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **Lucas Asidenos** as an ally.

Elvorix's Foresight
Versatile Team

"As was seen."

1/siege, choose one:

- Next hour, there will be three less **Alerts**.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon an **Exotic Assassin** with **Spinning Kick** and **Chronotorus** as an ally.

THE PEOPLE OF CALLIOPE
KNIGHTS OF THE DARK CORE

No matter what, the Knights of the Dark Core will always show up to protect Hell's Gate. Mistress Elske isn't petty enough to let personal trifles get in the way.

Hulls glowing red, drives disintegrating under the stress of deceleration, the Knights of the Dark Core drop from nearlight. Sunlight glints off mech armor as they come spilling from their ships in the dozens. The Cult's reinforcements are forced to redirect as the Knights engage.

Grandmistress Elske's imperious voice fills the local comm channels: "Knights, forward! Protect the Gate! DRIVE THESE BASTARDS BACK!"

You can hear cheers of relief filling the corridors.

When the Knights arrive, gain access to the **Grandmistress' Chosen**.

Grandmistress' Chosen
Team

"By my sworn oath, we shall suffer no foe who breaks the Code to live!"

2/siege, choose one that hasn't been chosen yet:

- Resolve a **Military Alert**.
- Resolve a **Military Alert**.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **Mistress Elske** as an ally.

THE BURNING FORGE

If

Space distorts briefly as a dozen ships drop from nearlight, all bearing the flaming anvil sigil of the Burning Forge. Infrared briefly whites out as the sky fills with missiles and mech launches. The Tachyon's hull buckles under the force of railgun impacts.

Across the cacophony, one man's voice can be heard, screaming at the top of his lungs, a decade of pain, hatred and loss pouring out: the Blacksmith.

*"CAPELLA! THERE WILL BE A **RECKONING**!"*

When the Forge arrives, they engage the *Tachyon* with such brutal ferocity that it cannot tick a segment on the **Lance Charging** clock this hour.

Forgemasters
Versatile Team

"What do our hammers break?!"

"METAL! METAL! METAL!"

"What do our enemies hide behind?!"

"METAL! METAL! METAL!"

2/siege, choose one that hasn't been chosen yet:

- Resolve a **Civilian Alert**.
- Resolve a **Military Alert**.
- At the start of the next combat encounter, summon **THE BLACKSMITH** as an ally.

CALLIOPE UNITED

Check if the team **at least three** of the following:

- Completed **Chapter 2: Fire and Ice** without allowing the Icebreaker's laser to fire.
- Completed **Chapter 3: Some Sick Game** without damage to Furnace City.
- Completed **Chapter 7: Why I'm So Cool and Popular** successfully.
- Completed **Chapter 8: Ballad of the Twin Lords** successfully without betraying Basil Theta.
- Completed **Chapter 9: The Bleeding Edge** successfully.

If they did, Calliope refuses to stand idly by while the heroes who've risked life and limb for them so many times are in danger.

You get a signal from the Gate's bridge. A single ship has dropped out of nearlight – the Bodega Bay. Almost immediately, they announce another: the Acacia Hill. Then another: the Soul of a Poet. Space starts to boil as ship after ship lurches from bolt: Grip Strength, Lake Lucerne, Face the Facts, What the Thunder Said, Second Sun, Yellow Creek, Dark Horizon, Silverthorn, Foreign Shores, Argument to Popularity – the bridge crew can't keep up.

New contacts spill from every ship: mechs, corvettes, strike craft. Cultist vessels desperately scramble to regroup as a system's worth of weaponry opens fire.

After you rose so many times to defend them, Calliope now rises to defend you.

When the people of Calliope arrive, extend both the **Civilian Pressure** and **Military Pressure** columns by two segments.

CAUSTIC

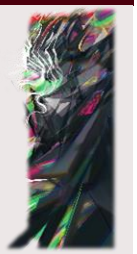
Your sensors scream conflicting information at you. A shadow dances on the edge of your vision. A dozen new contact alerts arrive at once, from all over the station. Three separate militia squads radio in for immediate combat assistance.

But then something changes. The pleas for help are replaced with confusion, then awe. One of the squad commanders calls in: "It's… a swarm of dark shapes, in three places at once! I dunno what the hell I'm looking at, but it's tearing the Cult to pieces!"

He sends video footage, and your mech's database registers a single entry: "silhouette match, 98% confidence: unidentified frame, Boltzmann."

CAUSTIC
Team

DEATH TO THE FLAME WITCH! *(i didn't forget the mercy you showed us)*



1/siege, choose one:

- Resolve *three* **Military Alerts**.
- At the start of any rounding during combat, **OBLITERATE** an enemy that isn't an **ELITE** or an **ULTRA**. Effects that would trigger from the character being destroyed don't; they don't even leave a wreck.

THE FAITH OF THE ONE

If the **Cult Influence** clock has no segments ticked, members of the Faith show up to fight their brethren.

	NAME	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
1–2	**Reactor Critical**	CIVILIAN	One of the station's reactors is overloading. Coolant systems have failed and the entire area is flooded with hard radiation. If this isn't stopped, it could take the other reactors with it.
3–4	**Fire**	CIVILIAN	Fires rage in one of the station's compartments, filling the air with smoke, swallowing precious oxygen and taxing the Gate's heat rejection systems. It needs to be put out before it spreads.
5–6	**Power Outage**	CIVILIAN	A local distributor has failed, and everything on that bus has shut down. Maybe you just need to flip a circuit breaker; maybe you need to replace every component in the box while under fire.
7–8	**Chemical Spill**	CIVILIAN	Dangerous chemicals have breached containment, bursting out of barrels, storage tanks or pipes. Someone needs to clean it up before it poisons the entire section or eats through the floor.
9–10	**Comms Failure**	CIVILIAN	Part of the station's internal communications system has been damaged, and orders can't get through. Someone needs to splice some wires and get the radio repeaters working again.
11–12	**Coolant Leak**	CIVILIAN	A coolant line has ruptured, spraying its contents all over a pipe junction. The station's vital components are starting to heat up…
13–14	**Hull Breach**	CIVILIAN	A compartment has been pierced and is open to space. Dangerous shrapnel fills the room, air is leaking, and it serves as a potential ingress point for invaders.
15–16	**Evacuate Section**	CIVILIAN	Defense of this section has become untenable; all civilians and any vital equipment must be moved out of the area immediately.
17–18	**Panic**	CIVILIAN	A group of civilians have become overwhelmed by stress and fear, and are acting out. Someone has to calm them down before they do something reckless or harmful.
19–20	**Systems Intrusion**	CIVILIAN	Enemy sigdivers have gained access to essential systems, and are wreaking havoc; someone needs to get rid of them on the double.

	NAME	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
1–2	**Hold Position**	MILITARY	No frills, no complications – the militia must hold this location against incoming enemies, but they're undermanned in this zone.
3–4	**Disarm Torpedo**	MILITARY	One of the torpedoes slipped under the Gate's point-defense cannons and struck the Gate, but failed to detonate. There's no guarantee it'll stay that way, though: someone has to make that thing safe.
5–6	**Delaying Action**	MILITARY	Another team's operation is taking longer than planned and hostile forces are advancing on their position. Someone needs to buy them time to finish the job.
7–8	**Running Dry**	MILITARY	A militia team holding a vital access corridor is down to their last six mags of ammunition. They're making every shot count, but they need a resupply, and they need it five minutes ago.
9–10	**Morale Broken**	MILITARY	Half of this platoon is shaking, their dead-eyed stares fixed on the middle distance. It's not fair, it's not right, but someone has to get them fighting again, because the only way out is through.
11–12	**Scorched Earth**	MILITARY	Desperate times call for desperate measures. Someone needs to set charges on a major thoroughfare or an important piece of equipment; if the militia can't hold it, they won't let the Cult have it either.
13–14	**Medevac**	MILITARY	Several members of a militia unit have been badly injured, and someone needs to get them from the front lines to an infirmary.

15–16	**Direct Assault**	**MILITARY**	The location of enemy forces is known, and the fight needs to be brought there. No fancy schemes or tactics; this will be a slugfest.
17–18	**Pincer Movement**	**MILITARY**	A large detachment of enemy forces has left themselves vulnerable from two angles. A militia team is already pressing in on one side; someone needs to take the other and finish the job.
19–20		**MILITARY**	

NAME	NPC TYPE	TRAITS	DESCRIPTION
Jerry Masters	**T2 ELITE VETERAN COMMANDER SCOURER**	**Scourer**: Emergency Vent, Pulse Laser **Veteran**: Deadly, Limitless **Commander:** Press On!	A newly-printed HA Sherman Mk. II, named *We Will Smile Again*
Zinfandel DeJean	**T2 VETERAN COMMANDER CUSTOM BASTION**	**Bastion:** Deathcounter, Siege Guardian **Deluge:** Quad Assault Cannons **Veteran:** Acrobat, Feign Death **Commander:** Press the Attack	A battered IPS-N Drake named *Now Where Did I Leave That*
Tarnveer "Printloaf" Malik	**OFF-FIELD**	The players have a pool of 10 additional **REPAIRS** that any of them can use.	A very beat-up IPS-N Lancaster, named *Cock-A-Doodle-Doo*
Takama "L-Kay" El Khayat	**T2 VETERAN SENTINEL**	**Size** 2 **Sentinel:** Punisher Ammunition **Veteran:** Lesser Sight, Shock Armor	An old IPS-N Tortuga, named *No Please, I Insist*
Ipswich "**SWITCH**" DeLacey	**T2 VETERAN SENTINEL**	**Size** 2 **Sentinel:** Bodyguard, Impaler **Veteran:** Deadly, Limitless	An IPS-N Tortuga, named *Frame Perfect,* covered in sponsor ads
LOKI Valentinian	**T2 VETERAN MIRAGE**	**Voider:** Metafold Shove, Multiplicity **Veteran:** Limitless, Slippery	A prototype HA Sunzi, named *Never-There*
THOR Valentinian	**T2 VETERAN AEGIS**	**Size** 2 **Aegis:** Adaptive Shielding, Guardian **Veteran:** Legendary, Shock Armor	An HA Saladin, named *Malazan Book of the Fallen*
TYR Valentinian	**T2 VETERAN SEEDER**	**Size** 2 **Seeder:** Grav Spike, Speed Deployer **Veteran:** Legendary, Lightning Reflexes	An HA Iskander, named *Tread Carefully*
Striga von Aldenberg	**T2 VETERAN WITCH**	**Witch:** Dark Cloud, Pain Transference **Veteran:** Hacker, Hardened Target	A kit-bashed mess of a mech named *Truth*
Howl	**T2 VETERAN MERCENARY BERSERKER**	**Berserker:** Nail Gun **Veteran:** Deadly, Self-Repair **Mercenary:** Efficient Killer	A wolf-headed IPS-N Blackbeard named *Dread Wolf's Call*
Ratio Salvager	**T2 VETERAN SCOUT**	**Scout:** Expose Weakness, Spotter **Veteran:** Headshot, Lesser Sight	A piecemeal SSC Swallowtail, named *Acausal Trade War*
Lucas Asidenos	**T2 VETERAN SLINGER**	**Slinger:** Another Hand Cannon **Veteran:** Deadly, Shock Armor	Placeholder
Harris Bordeaux	**OFF-FIELD**	At the start of each round, the players may mark a ⊹**1** area. At the end of the round, all characters in that area take **3d6**✷, half on a successful **AGILITY** check.	A red and gold SSC Monarch named *Bravado Tempest*

Johan Cienfuegos	**T2 VETERAN CUSTOM LODESTONE**	**Lodestone:** Hyperfragmentation **Operator:** Fade Generator **Veteran:** Deadly, Headshot	A blue-black SSC Metalmark named *Stiletto Nocturne*
Mistress Elske	**T2 VETERAN CUSTOM CATAPHRACT**	**Size** 2 **Bastion:** Guardian, Heavy Assault Shield **Cataphract:** Charge **Veteran:** Deadly, Lightning Reflexes	A gigantic IPS-N Nelson, named *The Whole Path of War and Acceptance*
The Blacksmith	**T2 VETERAN DEMOLISHER**	**Size** 3 **Demolisher:** Broad-Sweep Haft **Veteran:** Acrobat, Headshot	A colossal IPS-N Tortuga, named *John Henry's Hammer*
Mind	**OFF-FIELD**	Gain **2 charges.** Roll **2d20** and note the results. As a reaction, any player may expend a charge to switch the result of any **d20** roll with one of the noted results.	The communications architecture of the entire system.
Annabelle McKenzie	**T2 VETERAN PRIEST**	**Priest:** Empowered Shield **Veteran:** Lightning Reflexes, Insulated	One of the Cult's Priest rigs, repainted in the Gate's colors
CAUSTIC	**T2 VETERAN PARALLEL**	**Parallel:** Uncertainty, Wraithshot **Veteran:** Deadly, Hardened Target	An unknown mech of its own design.

RADIO CHATTER

1-2	*"Aft 4 medbay stacked – I repeat, zero capacity medbay Able 4! Reroute casualties medbays Able 5, Able 6!"*
3-4	*"Breach pod impact, foundry sector 3! Four mechs, twenty-four suits! Gold squad, redeploy to foundry sector 3 – from your position, first right, then 100 meters, then first left!"*
5-6	*"This is Central Coolant Storage – I need a wrench team right now! Something just came through the wall, and I got two tanks bleeding out!"*
7-8	*"Harvest 1, behind! Harvest 2, behind! Harvest 3, behi- shit, SHIT! I CALLED BEHIND YOU DUMB FU-* ***[static]****"*
9-10	*"Twilight Dream is away! I repeat, Twilight Dream is away! Wolf squad, RTB for another run! Falcon squad, stand by for next transport launch!"*
11-12	*"Vampire, Vampire, 300 count, outer zone countermeasures are engaging.* ***[static]*** *Vampire, 190 count, music is reacting in FLASHLIGHT mode, mid zone engaged, SWEEP protocol* ***[static]*** *Vampire, 10 count, inner zone close-in is tracking and live, music in CHARM mode* ***[static]*** *Vampire, 2 count, past inner zone. Goodb-* ***[static]****"*
13-14	*"Python 2, snap right,*
15-16	*"All civilians in the fore hab ring with first aid training, we need volunteers for all fore medbays. I say again, if you are in the fore ring and have first aid training, step forward. Casualty counts are in the thousands and we are drowning."*
17-18	*"Bridge, cancel resupply order for smelting section 2; there's about sixty of them here and just me left. Seal the bulkheads and be ready to vent atmo; I'm gonna blow the furnace open."*
19-20	

WHO YOU ARE IN THE DARK

The **Station Stability** clock is the closest thing *In Golden Flame* has to a morality meter. It is, in the simplest terms, a measurement of how much the team cares about the world they live in. Over the course of Acts 1 and 2, they've had ample opportunity to do things that improve the lives of the people around them, not only on Hell's Gate but across Calliope. This is the moment where the world pays back to them whatever they were willing to give to it.

If **Station Stability** is low, the PCs have likely made harsh and cynical choices, or they've neglected the world around them in pursuit of personal goals. Hell's Gate was in disarray even before the attack; its people saw little hope for the future before, and now the world is burning. Fight to save the Gate? What the fuck was there to save *before* the Cult blew everything up?

Order has completely broken down. Half the station is trying to force their way onto evacuation shuttles, and people are getting trampled. Those who can't get to the docking bays are panicking or just curled up in a corner, dead-eyed. Some people have taken to looting, settling grudges, or just breaking shit – after all, there's no tomorrow, so who's going to know? Calliope's done. Smoke 'em if you got 'em; nothing left to do but watch the credits roll.

But if **Station Stability** is high, the PCs have likely risked their own happiness and safety to make life better for others. They've put in the time and the effort. They've shed blood, sweat and tears to breathe some life and joy back into this shithole of a system.

People saw life could be better. They watched a nowhere place nobody in the galaxy ever gave a damn about turn into a home they could be proud of. They started to believe in a world where good things could happen, where people didn't just smile to hide the pain, they smiled because they were happy, because they were healthy, because *life was worth living*.

Now the world is burning. Now, they might have just five minutes left, and they are *not* going to let it all be for nothing. Everywhere the PCs look, they see the very best of humanity. People risk their lives to save each other, running towards the fire instead of away from it. Everyone finds their niche, the thing that they can do to help the most in this instant, and they do it.

“Oh fuck! OH FUCK! IT’S A CALIBAN! THEY’VE GOT A CALIBAN! ***HELP US!***”

COMBAT:
RED PLAGUE RID THEE

SITREP:	N/A	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	2x IPS-N CALIBAN – **T2 VETERAN RUINER**	Follow Through, Deadly, Slippery
	1x **T2 HIVE**	Driving Swarm
	1x **T2 PRIEST**	Empowered Shield
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 BASTION**	Deathcounter, Near-Threat Denial System
	+1x **T2 RAINMAKER**	Endless Rain
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 ELITE SEEDER**	Grav Spike, Speed Deployer

DETAILS

The Cult have deployed a terror weapon against Hell's Gate: two Calibans.

DETAILS

Cordelia Smith has played her only remaining card: a terrifying experimental chassis based off code reverse-engineered from the HORUS

BEAT ??:
THE PRICE OF FAILURE

If the **Lance Charging** clock reaches full, or if the **Station Stability** or **Militia Readiness** clocks collapse completely, the mission is lost. The entire station might be as well, were it not for the desperate final action of a man braver than anyone in Calliope could ever have known.

THE SACRIFICE

Siren's voice cuts through the chatter of the battlefield.

"I'm… sorry. We're out of time. Their killshot is lined up on the Gate and the spinal cannon is nearly charged. There's only one option left. I have to do this. Marines? I want you to know that I lov- wait, someone's aboard the Tooth! I'm locked out of the controls! Who… Jerry?!"

The transmission is cut off with a squelch of static. A tiny speck of light flies from the aft docking bay of Hell's Gate: HG-0451, the Dragon's Tooth, nearlight drive charging for one final, desperate voyage.

Back in the hangar, deck plating glows with the residual heat of an emergency casket ejection booster, as Siren silently screams for someone to find her and hook her into a comm line.

There is another voice on the channel: Jerry's.

"That all shall have their material needs fulfilled.

"That no walls shall stand between worlds.

"That no person shall be held in bondage through force, labor or debt."

There is a streak of light and then a cataclysmic flash, brighter than anything you have ever seen. The Tachyon has not even become dust; it has become light.

All is silent.

THE AFTERMATH

Remove the **Station Stability** clock entirely. Hell's Gate has likely suffered irreparable damage, and with Jerry dead there's no-one left who's capable of properly assessing the station's status anyway. There no longer exists a meaningful route to improving the fortunes of the Gate or its inhabitants.

Large sections of the station are in ruins, without power or atmosphere. The habitation rings are eerily quiet, and the furnaces of the industrial sector have gone dark. Lights flicker, trash piles up and water drips from untended pipes. A slow trickle of ships leaves the Gate every day – most of the survivors are getting ready to depart, or have already left.

Jerry's passing has broken everyone. Siren is brutally self-flagellating, blaming herself for his death, running simulations over and over to try and find out what she "did wrong." Chief McArthur is obsessively trying to fix parts of the station that she should know can't be fixed, like trying to hold back the tides of the ocean. Zinfandel DeJean takes shift after shift overseeing the evacuation effort, not sleeping and barely speaking.

Shelly went into cascade just after Jerry's death, and it was only sheer luck that someone was near to her casket at the time. She hasn't come off cycle yet, and the Union NHP specialist caring for her says they're not sure when she will.

CentComm awards Jerry the Azure Star, and there's serious talk of granting him the Olduvai Cross, not that pinning medals on him after his death will mean much. There are endless flowers piled in front of his space on the memorial wall. There'll be a funeral, but not until Shelly wakes up – and nobody knows when that will be.

What's left of the militia is still on the Gate, and will continue to use it as a base of operations, at least until the last civilians have departed. But every day, the station feels more like the gutted shell left behind after a housefire.

The team have lost, and they've lost *bad*. The war isn't over, but something irreplaceable has been taken from them: not just a friend and leader, not just thousands of human lives, but a faith, a home, a shared belief. Hell's Gate was more than just a place people lived – it was a dream of camaraderie carrying the day even in the most wretched of times.

That dream is dead.

BEAT ??:
FULMINATION
THE COUNTERATTACK

COMBAT:
WYRMWING

SITREP:	Holdout (*Lancer*, p. 272)	
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 ELITE SPACER SENTINEL**	Punisher Ammunition, Concussion Gun
	2x **T2 ACE**	Chaff Launchers, Strafe
	1x **T2 SHIP RAINMAKER**	Hound Missiles
	1x **T2 SPACER SUPPORT**	Remote Cloud, Gravity Rifle
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 VEHICLE RPV SCOUT**	Flier
	+1x **T2 SPACER WITCH**	
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 ELITE PIRATE HORNET**	HEX Missiles, Splinter Rounds
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x **T2 VETERAN SPACER BASTION**	Feign Death, Limitless
	2x **T2 VEHICLE ASSAULT**	Flier
	1x **T2 SHIP SEEDER**	Speed Deployer, Hopping Mines
FOR 4 PCS	+1x **T2 SPACER OPERATOR**	Skirmisher
	+1x **T2 SPACER PYRO**	Explosive Jet
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 SPACER VETERAN RONIN**	Feign Death, Slippery, Gravity Rifle

DETAILS

Riding on the back of the *Dragon's Tooth*, the PCs have one objective: *get to the Tachyon*.

The space between Hell's Gate and the enemy fleet is a chaotic, twisting no-man's-space, filled with mechs, strike craft and line vessels from both sides. Wreckage litters the void, and Siren has to employ every iota of skill she has to keep the ship in one piece. Her point defense cannons are completely saturated – while she deals with a storm of debris and incoming missiles, the PCs must repel boarders.

Tigershark Barrage
Full Action, Limited 1

Siren targets three ⊛**1** areas with Tigershark anti-ship missiles. All characters within at least one area must make an **AGILITY** save (target 14) or take **15**✷, half on a successful save. Enemies who are **LOCKED ON** automatically fail the save, but **LOCKED ON** is consumed.

Fire Main Gun
Full Action, Limited 1

Siren spins the ship and targets a ⇗**50** area with her spinal railgun, drawn from one edge of the ship. All characters within the area must make a **HULL** save (target 14) or immediately lose four points of **STRUCTURE**. On a successful save, they are reduced to **1 HP** and **1 STRUCTURE**.

If Siren has the **HA LGC-05 "TRANSCENDENT RAIL"** (p. ###), the ⇗**50** may be drawn from any point on the map to any point on the map, so long as it doesn't intersect the ship.

Defensive Suite
System

Characters on the ship have **soft cover** from all characters not on the ship, but this is not a zone of **soft cover** and cannot be hidden in.

If Siren has the **FKS "EMPYREAN" SHIELD GENERATOR** (p. ###), characters on the ship additionally have **RESISTANCE to all damage**, 🌡 and 🔥 from characters not on the ship.

COMBAT:
BLACK FIRE UPON US

SITREP:	Demolition (p. 320)	
OBJECTIVE(S):	5x **CAPACITOR ARRAY**	(**Size** 3, 20 **HP**)
ENEMY FORCES		
FOR 3 PCS:	1x ANDROS, LORD OF SPITE – **T2 ULTRA VETERAN CUSTOM PYRO**	**Size 2** **Pyro**: Napalm Bomb **Goliath:** Heavy Frame **Veteran**: +**HULL**, Acrobat **Ultra**: Devastator, Limitless, Supreme Maintenance
	1x **T2 VETERAN CATAPHRACT**	Insulated,
FOR 4 PCS:	+1x **T2 HORNET**	HEX Missiles
FOR 5 PCS:	+1x **T2 ELITE RAINMAKER**	Hades Missiles
REINFORCEMENTS		
FOR 3 PCS:	+1x **T2 PLACEHOLDER**	

DETAILS

The PCs have only minutes before the *Tachyon's* long-cycle lance fires, obliterating Hell's Gate. They do not have time to safely disengage the firing sequence; the only remaining option is to destroy the lance's gargantuan capacitor arrays. This will leave the ship in a critically unstable state, its reactors spun up to maximum with nowhere to dump their output; the PCs had better be ready to run.

ANDROS has modified his mech substantially since the last time he faced the players characters, and has changed his tactics. Without Ignatius and his stolen blinkspace tech, Andros once again relies on the **VETERAN** template's **ACROBAT** trait: a set of integrated jump jets that allow him to fly short distances. This effectively changes his movement speed from 2 to 5 so long as he isn't **SLOWED**. Combined with a **BOOST** and **LIMITLESS**, this lets him cross 15 spaces in a turn – a frightening amount of mobility for a Pyro.

His **SUPREME MAINTENANCE** trait lets him reload his **NAPALM BOMB** for free, allowing him to use it every turn. This gives him the option for a high damage **BARRAGE** so long as enemies are in range. If possible, start with the **NAPALM BOMB** to apply **Burn** to a player mech first, then use the **FLAMETHROWER**, since its damage is doubled on characters who already have **Burn**.

Andros fights with little care for his own survival, but there's no Fire Gate nearby, so he can't return to the battle if he dies. He's fine with dying immediately *afterwards*, but he wants to win first.

If the PCs summoned **LUCAS ASIDENOS** as an ally during this fight, they've made a terrible mistake. The prophecy states he will die in battle with "Hell's mightiest warrior", and though the PCs refused to kill him, Andros also qualifies. Any successful attack Andros makes against Lucas counts as a **critical hit** and automatically deals maximum damage. If Andros destroys Lucas' mech, he's killed instantly.

ENEMY MECH

ANDROS, LORD OF SPITE

SIZE 2

Ultra Veteran Custom Pyro
Defender

"Do I believe it? These pricks singin' hallelujah to a fuckin' can-brain? No! Course not, it's fuckin' nonsense. But you know what I DO believe? I believe in power, and Feather has a fuckin' LOT. Is it really a god? I dunno, mate, leave that one to the philosophers. Feather can make us immortal, so I'll say some bloody prayers if that's what it takes."

– Andros, to a former Hell Hound

HUL: +2	**HP:** 18	**Armor:** 3
AGI: +0	**Evasion:** 8	**Speed:** 2
SYS: -1	**E-Defense:** 8	**Save Target:** 12
ENG: +4	**Heat Cap:** 12	**Sensors:** 8

CUSTOM

As a **CUSTOM**, **ANDROS** uses weapons, systems or traits not typically found on mechs in his class.

ULTRA VETERAN

As an **ULTRA VETERAN**, **ANDROS**:

- Takes two separate turns each round, or three if there are 5 or more players.
- Has **5 structure** and **5 stress**.
- Gains **+1** on all **HULL** checks and saves.
- Can clear one condition affecting him at the start of his turn and repair one destroyed system or weapon at the end of his turn.
- Deals **+1d6** damage on critical hits.
- Can **OVERWATCH** any number of times a round.
- Rolls all **structure** and **stress** checks twice and chooses either result.

SYSTEMS

The Great Flame

Heavy CQB, 4 (self), +1 vs Evasion
[5] [4]

This weapon deals **double** to characters that already have any .

"Gotta hand it to the freaks, they dream up some crackin' names for things."

Immolating Torrent

Main Launcher, Arcing, Loading, +2 vs Evasion
[5] [1] [4 + 4]

"D'you know you can put chlorine trifluoride in a mortar round? Well, you can do it once."

BURNING BUT NEVER CONSUMED — Trait

Andros has **IMMUNITY** to .

"Does dyin' hurt? Mate, you can't even imagine. Wanna know something though? I kinda like it."

BRIMSTONE DELUGE — Trait

1/round, when Andros makes a successful attack, all characters within line of sight take **4** .

"They don't care if they die for me. What the fuck makes you think I would?"

ADAMANT MALICE — Trait

Andros can't be pushed, pulled, knocked **PRONE** or knocked back by smaller characters.

"Nothing can touch me. Imagine the power."

SPEED OF DARKNESS — Trait

After Andros moves or **BOOSTS**, he can **fly 3 spaces**, ignoring engagement and reactions.

"Amazin' the ways you can make a Genghis move when you don't 'ave to bring it back."

ARCHITECTURE OF DESTRUCTION

Trait, Quick Action, Free Action

Andros gains **IMMUNITY** to **JAMMED**; additionally, he can reload one **LOADING** weapon as a **free action** on his turn and can repair a destroyed weapon or system as a **quick action**.

"When knobs keep breakin' your fuckin' weapons, you learn to bodge 'em back together."

CORE SAFETIES DISENGAGED — Trait

Andros can **OVERCHARGE**. Instead of the standard cost, he always gains **1d6** .

"I can run my mech as hot as I want, as long as I want. Reactor melts down? I'll be back."

Wave of Enmity

System, Full Action

Andros clears all . Characters in **1** must pass an **AGILITY** save or take equal to **half the amount Andros cleared** and be knocked **PRONE**.

"Even my hate becomes a weapon. Beauty."

OUTCOME

Ultimately, the outcome of either victory or defeat is much the same; this entire battle has been a bluff, a feint to buy time for Ignatius to put his plan into motion.

PC DEFEAT

Your life ends so abruptly that you do not even have time to perceive it.

Out of time, with the PCs unable to stop the lance from firing and the lives of two million people hanging in the balance, Jerry makes an impossible choice. He rams one of the station's patrol clippers into the *Tachyon* at nearlight, obliterating the *Tachyon*¸ the *Dragon's Tooth*, his own ship, himself, the PCs and Andros in a blinding flash of light.

Calliope's future is now totally uncertain; the only thing that can be known for sure is the PCs will play no further part in it.

If you don't want the story to end here, there's another option: the PCs can survive and save Hell's Gate, but at a terrible cost. With the capacitors fully charged and the final stage of the sequence initiated, there's still one way to stop the lance from firing: detonating a mech's coldcore inside the lance's accelerator. But there's no time to program an autopilot; someone will have to do it manually, and they have only seconds to pull it off. This means someone will have to sacrifice themself.

Someone is going to have to die: a PC or one of their NPC allies. If a PC has an AI system inside their mech, it can make the sacrifice for them; this isn't a huge loss if it's just a Comp/Con, but if it's an NHP, that's a friend and co-pilot that's giving their life for the team. There isn't even time for goodbyes: someone must act *now*.

PC VICTORY

Andros' mech slumps over, pierced in ten thousand places, armor scorched, corroded, blasted away. It begins to crumble like spent charcoal, just as it did back on Fort Cerberus.

And once again, Andros is laughing.

THE AWAKENING GOD

"They're all so fuckin' predictable. All I had to do was threaten you, and they all came crawlin' out the woodwork to save you. I've got all of you here, see? Right where I want you. Two hours travel from Kalevala."

Andros groans and coughs, blood spilling from his mouth and turning to black ash. "I did my part, old man. You better've done yours."

Any PC with an omnihook will notice that the blinkvoid has now receded, and instantaneous communication is back online. There is an urgent system-wide communication from the Icebreaker Borealis.

Across every feed in Calliope, a distress broadcast from the Icebreaker Borealis plays, showing live footage from the station's long-range cameras. The battered hulk of an older-model Armory dreadnought hangs silently in the void, its radiators exposed and glowing white-hot. Only a few hundred kilometers in front is the tiny moonlet of Kantele.

A voice cuts across the feed: Ignatius Aurum. "May she forgive all our sins. May she take away the burdens of this world."

There is a blinding flash as the dreadnought fires. Rock becomes magma becomes vapor becomes plasma. Above the moon, the sheer stress of firing its weapon detonates the vessel's reactors, and the proximity of the blast reduces what remains to dust.

You feel it before you see it, the birth-scream of a terrible creature unshackled by time and space. The molten debris that was Kantele is pulled back together, forming two mighty wings that cradle a core of burning gold.

Andros grins like a crocodile as his body crumbles, followed swiftly by his mech. Alarms begin to blare as a stern voice announces that the Tachyon's self-destruct sequence has been initiated.

END OF ACT 2

Again the Tyrant spoke, their voice shaking the very foundations of the earth:

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I BELIEVED
IN THE POWER OF REASON
THAT THERE WAS NO EVIL
ONLY A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

THE WORLD STOLE THIS FAITH
AS IT STOLE MY FRIENDS
AND MY DREAMS
AND MY LOVES

FROM THE MOMENT MY POWER
WAS GIFTED TO ME
I HAD NO ILLUSIONS
OF WHAT I WOULD DO WITH IT

I DID NOT SEEK A KINDER WORLD
I COULD NOT IMAGINE SUCH A THING
HOW COULD KINDNESS COME
FROM A WORLD THAT KILLED IT?

THE UNIVERSE IS POISON
EVERYTHING WITHIN IT A WEAPON
AND IF THERE IS NO ESCAPING IT
I SHALL MASTER IT

I AT LEAST AM AWARE
OF WHAT I HAVE BECOME
I WISH NEVER TO FACE IT
IT IS THE ONE BATTLE I WOULD LOSE

I HAVE GONE TOO FAR TO TURN BACK
IF I LET GO OF MY ANGER
WHAT WILL I HAVE LEFT
BUT THE THINGS I HAVE DONE?

GO NOW
TELL YOUR CHILDREN THAT YOU SPOKE
TO THE TYRANT ON THE MOUNTAIN
AND LIVED TO TELL OF IT

The commoner went forth from the mountain, changed. Within them, a power began to grow.

A Tyrant yet waits upon that highest mountain, though they do not bear the same face.

-- excerpt, the Parable of the Tyrant upon the Mountain

EPILOGUE:
BEGINNING OF THE END

Act 2 can end with the PCs in any number of different places or situations, but there should be one common element no matter where they are or what's going on: this is their darkest hour, and their lowest point.

Even if everything went as well as it could, even if they did everything right, many people died, and a lot more got hurt. They might have saved the people that mattered to them, but thousands of others weren't so lucky. They're in all-out war now, and their enemies are rapidly moving towards their endgame.

THE REAL ZINFANDEL

At the end of Act 2, Zinfandel decides to open up to the player characters. The PCs will get a message from Zin, telling them to meet somewhere out of the way – wherever you can smoke without setting off a fire alarm.

"This might be the last time we get to spend together. Maybe we're dead tomorrow, or next week, or hell, maybe in an hour. So, I want you to hear this. You guys, the people who've always been out there on the front lines. They call me militia commander, but… well, each day it feels more like you're the ones in charge of keeping us safe.

"My name really is Zinfandel DeJean. My birth name, I mean. I didn't make up a new one for Calliope. In fact, irony's a killer – Calliope's the first place in two thousand years I DIDN'T use a fake name."

Zinfandel was born on Cradle in the late 2800s – more than two thousand years ago. They felt a wanderlust that took them far from the world of their birth, signing on with a FirstComm far-field team to explore distant rimworlds. When they returned home to discover the fascist Second Committee in power, they briefly flirted with revolution, but ultimately decided they were too cowardly to go through with it.

Instead, they spent the next two thousand years in limbo, travelling from star to star at nearlight. Most of their time was spent in pause tanks, stretching them out across the centuries. Every few decades, their ship would make port somewhere, and they'd spend a few months refueling, repairing and recuperating, checking to see if SecComm had fallen yet, helping local activists if there wasn't major risk involved, then vanishing back into interstellar space.

It took 1,720 years. Zinfandel DeJean bitterly remarks that they slept through the entire revolution: despair had led them to taking longer and longer trips, and they were just 6 years into a 98-light-year jaunt when the Hercynian Crisis started. When they started their trip, SecComm seemed stronger than ever; by the time they reached their destination, the regime had crumbled and its leaders were dead or in disgraced exile.

Under the leadership of ThirdComm, Union was slowly entering a new era of freedom and prosperity, but to Zinfandel it felt utterly hollow. They hadn't fought for this; they'd spent all seventeen brutal centuries of the regime's rule safe among the stars, waiting for others to do the hard work of liberation for them. As one of the *original* Cosmopolitans, they were no stranger to the alienation of relativistic travel, but this was different; it wasn't just that they felt alien to this freer, happier time. They felt like they didn't deserve it.

So they just kept walking.

"I could've picked any of those worlds, any one of 'em. I could've actually stood for something, actually tried to make a difference. But I didn't. Billions of people suffered and died while I waited for them to fix things for me. We roast the shit out of tourists in Calliope but I was the biggest fucking tourist of all; I spent two millennia living the highlight reel.

"There are memorials, statues raised up to martyrs and revolutionaries and freedom fighters who died before mechs were invented, and some of them are people I met, people I shared drinks and cigarettes and beds with. People I ran little jobs for, when the price was right and I wasn't in danger. They fought the real wars, died in the real wars, and what did I do? Sightsee for a few months, then go somewhere else, be someone else.

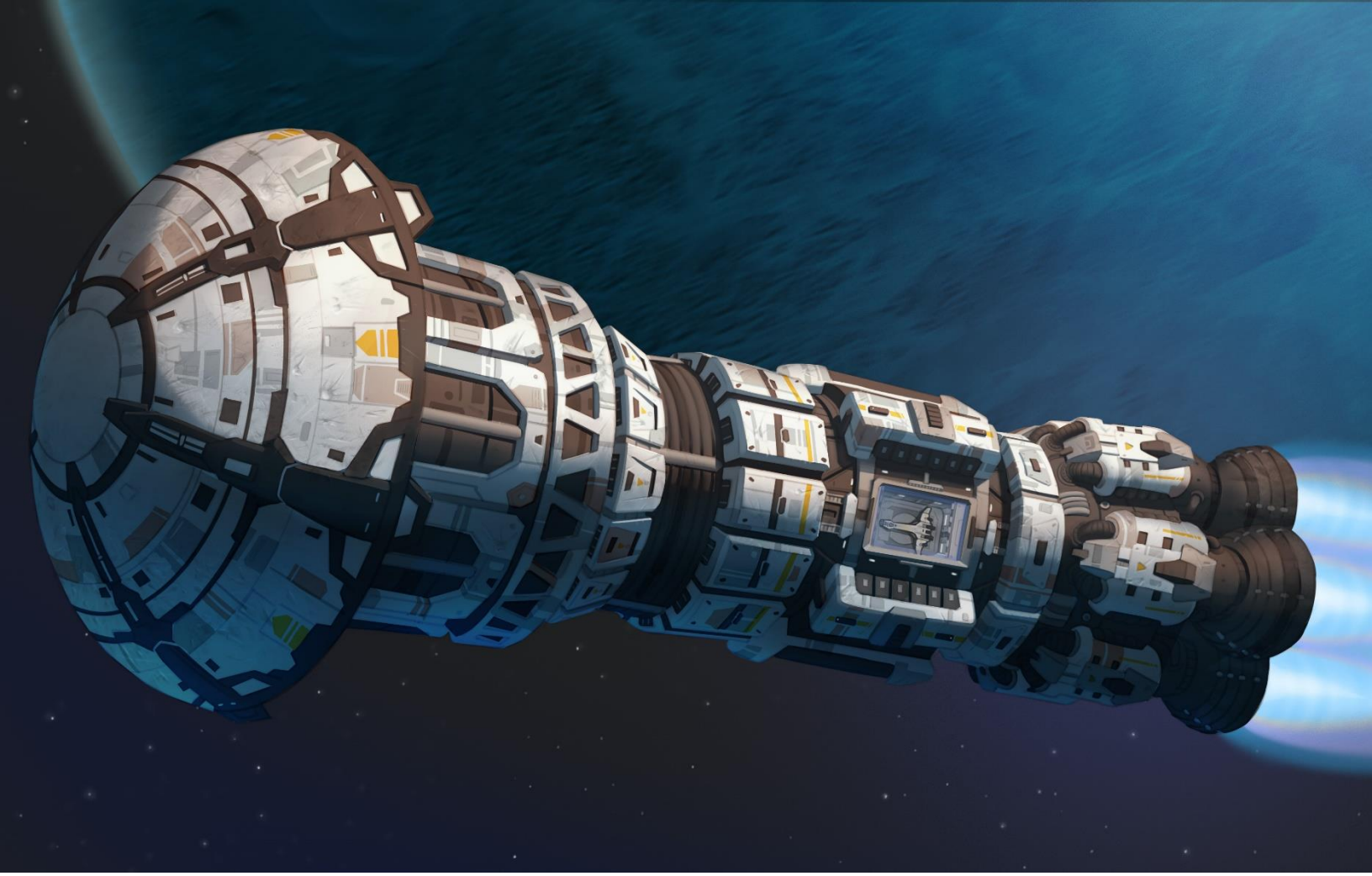
"When SecComm finally crumbled, people just like them were ready to give me all the happiness they'd paid for in blood and smoke and dead friends, give it all away for free, but how could I accept? What had I given up to earn it? I took the shortcut."

Zinfandel first heard about Calliope in the 4850s, just at the tail end of the Pyrite Age. But they were more than 150 light years away, and by the time they arrived in the system, the Void Age was in full swing.

Zinfandel arrived just a couple of months after the Demon Winter; the Hell's Gate militia were in shambles and pilots for both chassis and patrol craft were in short supply. Breaking the habit of a lifetime, they decided to delay their departure – but only for a few months, just until Hell's Gate got back on its feet.

They served as a transport pilot at first, but slowly built up hours in the chassis training simulators as well. A few months turned into a year, a year into a decade. They ran missions under Jerry's command. They made squad commander. Their ship sat untouched in the hangar for a decade, and then two.

"I want you to know. When the newcomer fleets showed up, I started fixing up my ship. I felt the same old urge, to run, to move on, to let this be someone else's problem. But no more running. I'm giving you my ship, the Voidrunner – it's yours. Don't even bother saying no. I'm with you, right to the end."



THE *VOIDRUNNER*

The team now has access to the ISV *Voidrunner*, a truly ancient GMS Pattern-112 *Teviot* interstellar cutter that used to belong to Zinfandel DeJean.

The *Teviot* (often known as "the One-Twelve") is a typical example of GMS spacecraft design during the late First Expansion Period: dependable, utilitarian, valuing function over form. Intended mostly for use by Union Science Bureau far-field teams, the *Teviot* was designed to be highly automated and easy to maintain, allowing it to last decades or even centuries without seeing a shipyard, while the crew remained in stasis for perceptual years.

The *Voidrunner* is hardly a typical example of the *Teviot* class – although that's not saying much, given that most remaining *Teviots* are museum pieces. The ship was never originally meant to mount weapons larger or more powerful than an asteroid defense system, but the supreme interoperability of GMS equipment let Zinfandel retrofit the ship until it could run a SecComm blockade and tangle with patrol craft twice its size.

As technology advanced over the centuries, Zinfandel also improved the automation to the point that the ship could run itself essentially forever so long as it had access to fuel and RawMat.

The *Voidrunner* is much too large to enter or leave a planetary atmosphere, and instead carries two SSTO (Single-Stage To Orbit) landing craft while it remains in low orbit. If the *Dragon's Tooth* is still functional, it can take the place of one of the landing craft.

It has a fully functional nearlight suite, a high-bandwidth omnihook for FTL communication, an empty NHP-C module that Siren can be placed in, a fully-stocked maintenance bay for mechanized chassis, two hangar bays for its landing craft (or the *Dragon's Tooth*), and a large suite of weapons capable of orbit-to-surface fire, allowing it to deliver the **Bombardment** reserve.

If the PCs obtained the **SSC "Svarog" Schedule 1 Printer** (p. ###), it can easily be transferred to the *Voidrunner* – in fact, the ship is a much better fit for it, given its space and power requirements.

It will likely not be relevant during the campaign, but the *Voidrunner* also contains pause tanks and a relativistic particle shield for interstellar travel. Theoretically, it has a maximum travel distance of almost a thousand light-years, and in truth this limitation only exists because pause tanks can only sustain a person in stasis for about a century before lethal complications occur. If the PCs really want to go somewhere other than Calliope, the entire Orion Arm is now open to them.

BEAT ??:
THE CRONE

HOW DO WE SAVE CALLIOPE?

"Things will get even more difficult going forward. The time for making new allies has likely passed. You will have to proceed with the people you have.

WHY ARE YOU LIKE THIS?

"Oh, that's rich. There's an old Jon Berger quote from Ways of Seeing: 'you painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting "Vanity," thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for you own pleasure.'

"Why am I like this? I am the way I am because that's how it was decided I would be. If you object so bitterly, whine harder, and I'm sure the powers that be will cram me into a shape more to your liking. Why wouldn't they?"

HOW COULD WE HAVE WON?

"I don't think you'll like the answer."

But if the PCs press her…

"Well, what do you count as winning? Sometimes, getting everything you want isn't even an option. Sometimes, victory is doing the best you can with what you have. Was there a sequence of events in which you stopped the Cult from cracking Kantele and still saved Hell's Gate? Maybe. Maybe not.

"Do you feel like you did the best you could? Is Hell's Gate still standing? Are your friends all alive? Then that's the best victory you're going to get for now. Defeat only destroys you if it removes any chance of winning the war."

APPENDIX 1: CONTENT

PLACEHOLDER

A GOOD HAUL

Calliope Placeholder

RIVALRY

What made you feel this way about them? Maybe you never felt like you could measure up. Or maybe it was the other way around: you felt like they didn't deserve what they had. Either way, just looking at them sets your blood boiling. You're better than them – you are, you know it! You just have to prove it to everyone else.

YOU AIN'T NOTHIN'!

When you take this talent, choose another pilot (hopefully a PC, but NPCs are fine if your GM allows it) to be your **RIVAL**.

1/round, you may benefit from one of the following:

- When your **RIVAL** attacks a target in your line of sight and misses, your next attack against that target receives **+1**.
- When you attack a target in your **RIVAL**'s line of sight and miss, your next attack against that target receives **+1**.

Between missions, you can replace your **RIVAL** with a new one, but only if your relationship with them has changed.

WE'RE NOT FINISHED YET!

Gain the following reaction:

Get Back Here!
`Reaction, 1/scene`

Trigger: Your turn starts, and your **RIVAL** is at least ten spaces away from you.

Effect: You may **BOOST**, moving toward your **RIVAL** so fast it counts as **teleporting**.

NOW, WITNESS TRUE SKILL!

When your **RIVAL** misses an attack, you know by how much it missed. You can tell them if you want.

Gain the following reaction:

Show You How It's Done
`Reaction, 1/round`

Trigger: Your **RIVAL** misses an attack against a target within your line of sight and **5**.

Effect: You may **OVERWATCH** against the same target.

UNDERHANDED

After twenty years in the arenas, Galanades "Fury" Breaker knows one thing for sure: they don't ask how, they ask how many. All the traditionalists gasped and clutched their pearls and called her a disgrace to the sport, unfit to be champion. Her answer: show her a war won with honor instead of bullets, and maybe then she'll start fighting fair.

FIGHT DIRTY

You gain **3 CHEAT DICE**. Whenever you hit a hostile character within **3** with a melee or ranged attack, you may expend a **CHEAT DIE** as a reaction and choose one of the following effects that you haven't chosen yet this scene:

- **ROCK THE COCKPIT**: The target becomes **IMPAIRED** until the end of their next turn.
- **GRIT THE SERVOS**: The target becomes **SLOWED** until the end of their next turn.
- **LOOK OVER THERE**: The target can't take **reactions** this turn, and can't **react** to this attack.

If you have none, you regain 1 **CHEAT DIE** when you **rest**, and you regain them all when you perform a **FULL REPAIR**.

CONFOUND THEM

Gain **5 CHEAT DICE** instead of **3**; additionally, you gain the following new options when using **FIGHT DIRTY**:

- **OIL THE CAMERAS**: The target becomes **BLINDED** until the end of their next turn.
- **BLOCK THEIR VIEW**: Until the end of their next turn, the target receives **+3** on any attack that doesn't target you.

PRANKSTER'S GAMBIT

Gain **6 CHEAT DICE** instead of **5**. **FIGHT DIRTY** no longer requires a reaction – you may apply it to any melee or ranged attack you make, whether or not it's your turn. You may still only choose each option **1/scene**, and you may only use **FIGHT DIRTY 1/turn**.

If you destroy a hostile character in the same turn you use **FIGHT DIRTY** on them, you regain **1 CHEAT DIE**.

NEW MECHS

During **Act 1**, a PC might

NEW CONDITION: BLINDED

BLINDED characters can only draw line of sight to adjacent spaces.

There are talents, mech systems and NPC abilities in core *Lancer* inflict an effect identical to **BLINDED**.

- **INFILTRATOR** talent's third tier, **Mastermind**.
- **CENTIMANE** talent's third tier, **Tidal Suppression**.
- **CRACK SHOT** talent's third tier, **Watch This**.
- The **METALMARK**'s **Flash Charges** (when used as a **Flash Mine**) and **Shock Wreath**.
- The **ARCHER**'s **BLINDING SHELLS**.
- The **WITCH**'s **BLIND**, appropriately.
- The **VETERAN** template's **HEADSHOT**.

It may be advisable *not* to convert these effects to inflict the **BLINDED** condition, since conditions can be removed via **STABILIZE** and traits like the **ULTRA** template's **JUGGERNAUT**, which decreases their utility as control tools.

SIZE 1/2

HORUS
IMP

Controller/Striker
Goblin Variant

Formal Union acknowledgement of the Imp PG is very recent; the earliest mention in the *Universal Threat Assessment Manual* is less than a year old. Unofficially, IPS-Northstar Trunk Security teams began reporting unusual pirate attacks just after the turn of the millennium: sudden raids by teams of small, heavily armed mechs which stole no physical goods, instead plundering seemingly random data from ship mainframes and personal devices. Haunted Trunk Security pilots spoke of their rigs "betraying" them: weapons systems targeting friendlies, reactors overloading themselves, motive systems straying from cover, and "ghost voices" on the radio whispering random numbers, curses and the names of dead relatives.

The Imp places the electronic warfare prowess of the INSTINCT rig into a chassis with greater survivability. Curiously, however, changing the context of its deployment also seems to drastically alter its developmental pathways. Pilots often report the manifestation of "demon signals," irrational data streams that cause catastrophic damage to electronic systems.

CORE STATS

Size: 1/2
Armor: 2
HULL
HP: 6
Repair Cap: 4
AGILITY
Evasion: 10
Speed: 5
Save Target: 11
Sensors: 5
SYSTEMS
E-Defense: 10
Tech Attack: +2
SP: 7
ENGINEERING
Heat Cap: 4

TRAITS

INTRUSION SPIKE
When the Imp makes a **tech attack** against an adjacent character, it always uses the lower of the target's **EVASION** or **E-DEFENSE**.

INJURY TO INSULT
The Imp's **tech attacks** can **critically hit**. When they do, the Imp may choose one:

- The target becomes **IMPAIRED** until the end of their next turn.
- The target becomes **LOCKED ON**.
- The target receives an additional **2** .

MOTOR GREMLINS
Against targets that have at least one **condition**, the Imp counts as **SIZE 3** for the purposes of **RAM** and **GRAPPLE**.

MOUNTS

MAIN/ AUX | **FLEX MOUNT**

CORE SYSTEM

DEMON SIGNAL

Hear the delicate ticking and whirring of every machine around you. See the elegant perfection of fractals and numeric series. Take a moment to appreciate the logic of a legislator's argument or a philosopher's exegesis.

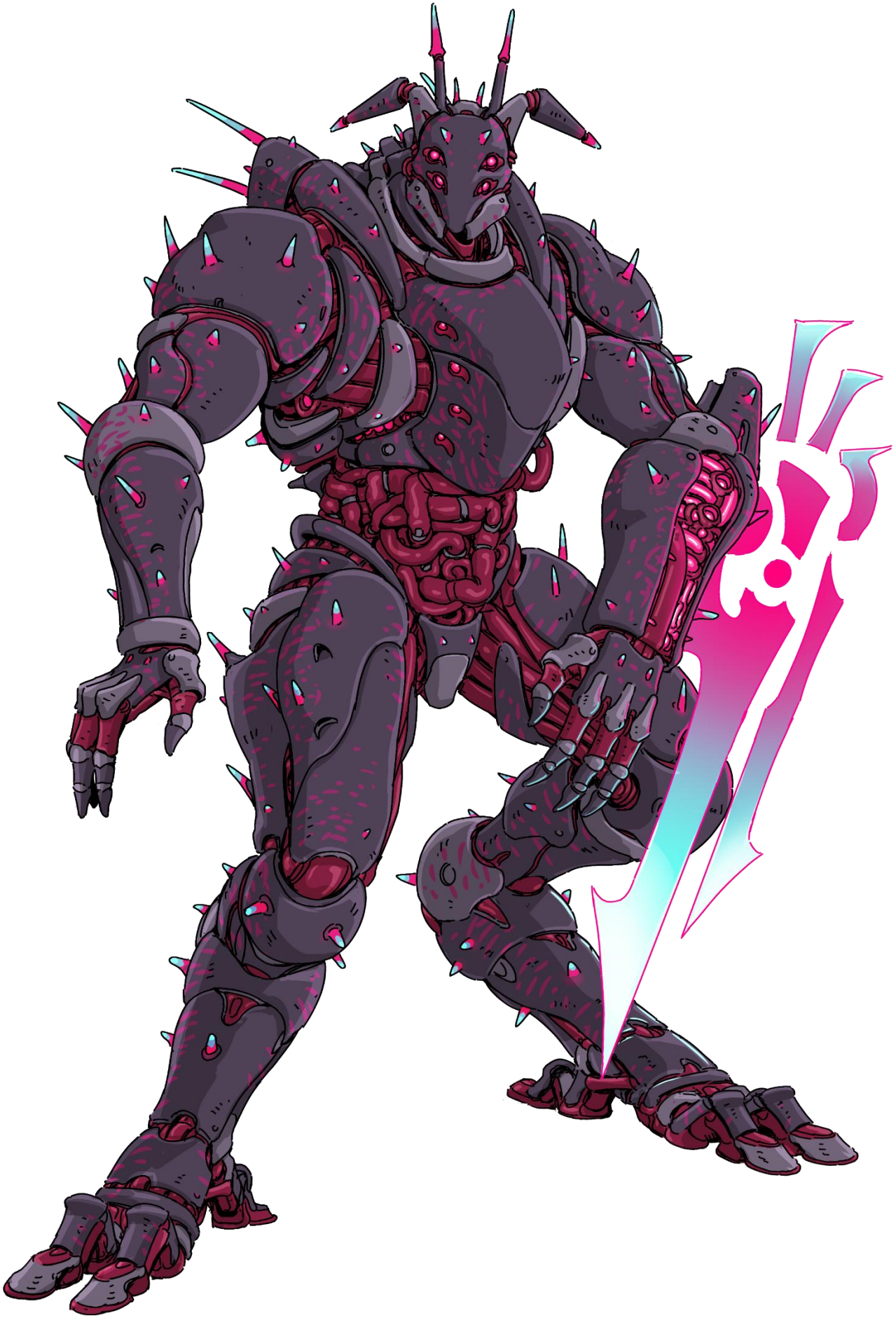
Now: turn your words into knives, numbers into swords, thoughts into bludgeons, ideas into arrows. Strike truth like a bell until it cracks from the ringing. Drink the hot blood of reality as it oozes from fresh wounds. Order is complex and fragile, but entropy? Entropy is simple.

Integrated Mount: *Antilogic Blade*

Antilogic Blade
Auxiliary Melee
[1] [2+X]
1/turn, you can attack with this weapon in place of an attack you would make with a different auxiliary melee weapon.

This weapon deals equal to two plus the number of **conditions** on the target. If you consumed **LOCK ON** for this attack, it still counts toward this total.

Infolytic Shriek
Active (1CP), Quick Tech, Efficient
You make a special **tech attack** against a hostile character within **SENSORS** that can't miss, but is still rolled and can **critically hit**. The target becomes **IMPAIRED**, **SLOWED**, **BLINDED** and **SHREDDED** until the end of their next turn.



THE CRIMSON HAND

During **Act 1**, a PC might have heard the legend of Marika Wren and Lin Zhihao, a pirate and a bounty hunter who fought each other for years in the early Void Age. They may also have discovered proof that it was more than just a myth, in the form of the **Golden Hand**, Marika Wren's famed six-shooter.

But the existence of Marika's **Golden Hand** implies the existence of its equal and opposite, Zhihao's **Crimson Hand**. The guns are tied together by fate, and whomsoever wields one will inevitably cross paths with the wielder of the other – or so the story goes, at least.

Anyone who owns the Golden Hand knows this is more than just a story, though; they feel *compelled* to seek out the other half of the legend. Moreover, the gun is impatient; it will not be satisfied by a wielder who refuses the call.

The character wielding the Golden Hand will have a five-segment **Seeking the Crimson Hand** clock, and at the start of **Act 2**, they will usually have a maximum of three segments ticked.

NO TIME FOR DAWDLIN'

The Golden Hand is a proud gun, and will get upset if a downtime passes without the PC making serious effort to find the Crimson Hand, or if a PC doesn't equip it during a mission. It will plague its wielder with vivid nightmares and irritating turns of bad luck until they apologize to it and rectify their behavior – this can be done either by equipping it again or by ticking a segment on **Seeking the Crimson Hand**.

If two consecutive downtimes pass without any effort made to locate the Crimson Hand, or if the Golden Hand is not equipped for two missions in a row, it abandons its wielder in disgust, going missing in some odd and inexplicable way. Its former wielder loses access to it permanently.

Up until three ticks on the **Seeking the Crimson Hand** clock, the wielder has been receiving dreams and visions from the Golden Hand in, which have dropped hints about where to look. Now, the visions have mostly ceased, as if the gun is telling the PC to pull their own weight now. However, three visions keep coming up.

The first vision is a tall figure in a wide-brimmed hat and long duster walking away from a sunset, empty-handed, whistling a melancholy tune.

The second vision is a dark-haired, middle-aged woman standing at a barren well, letting a golden coin fall from her bleeding hand into the darkness below.

The third image is of a planet sitting on a colossal anvil, before being smashed to pieces by a giant hammer.

INTERLUDE 4A:
A THORN ON YOUR SIDE

The last vision the **Golden Hand**'s wielder saw was on Mróz, of an old man named Thorn von Aldenberg getting a signal from an old satellite out near Zethus, but his old lair contained nothing useful and the satellite is no longer there. Anyone who's dealt with sigdivers will recognize the name "von Aldenberg;" perhaps he was a relative of Striga?

Striga is not hard to find; she and some of her clique will be in orbit of Umbra near Chameleon until the issues with Harrison Armory are resolved, and after that, she can be found back on Hell's Gate, either at Happy Noodle or in the hab block her clique have taken over. Add to that her inexplicable ability to appear in places she shouldn't be, and locating her isn't a problem. Asking her about Thorn, however, might be.

The moment you mention the name "Thorn," Striga produces a knife, and – in an astounding display of strength you hadn't expected from her – pins you against a wall with the blade to your throat.

"WHERE DID YOU HEAR THAT NAME?! NOBODY LIVING SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GRAMPA!"

Fortunately for the wielder, Striga is absolutely willing to believe that they discovered the name in a postcognitive vision given to them by an unprovably sentient gun once owned by a legendary pirate – this actually lines up with six separate conspiracy theories she's been working on recently.

Thorn raised Striga after her parents passed away in an "accident" (she suspects they were murdered, but there is none of the usual excitement in her voice when she says this), and he taught her much of what she knows about sigdiving and conspiracies. At the end of his life, he asked her to erase all record of his existence from the Muse so that the Data Vampires couldn't reanimate his homunculus to feed on.

She has an old datavault containing a lot of his files, but she's never been able to crack the encryption. She asks to inspect the **Golden Hand**, and if allowed, discovers to her delight that its device driver is spitting out a small part of the cipher key every time it fires. She asks to install a packet sniffer on the wielder's mech. During their next mission, they must fire the weapon at least six times to produce the entire key.

Once they've done this, Striga excitedly reports that the data is decrypting, and will be ready to view by the time they're done with the mission. The PC with the **Golden Hand** ticks the fourth segment on their **Seeking the Crimson Hand** clock.

INTERLUDE 4B:
BALLAD OF GUN BROTHER TEN

At several points during **Act 2**, the wielder of the Golden Hand may encounter a man known as **Gun Brother Ten**. He's a folk hero around Calliope, famed for swooping in to defend the downtrodden with his expert gunmanship – in or out of the cockpit of his Raleigh. It's possible that a PC might have been saved by him themself.

PCs might think to ask him about the **Golden Hand**, and he will give them a very blunt answer.

"I know what you're lookin' for. That golden gun you sling? Used to be mine. Used to be my family's, for that matter. Don't fret, not interested in takin' it from you. Gave up on that life a long time back."

Gun Brother Ten explains that he's the grandson of Marika Wren and Lin Zhihao – his mother is Hope Lin-Wren. Both of his maternal grandmothers died before he was born, and Hope, who had wielded both guns for many years, wanted him to follow in her footsteps and act as guardian to "the family secret."

Ten was uninterested in shouldering the burden that had hollowed out his mother's entire life, and turned his back on it. This led to a rift between the two, and they have not spoken in decades, but for once when Ten won the **Golden Hand** in a duel and returned it to Hope. He says she's been letting the guns out into the wild every so often, hoping it will bring her a champion who'll take up the responsibility he refused.

He warns the wielder that the guns are a burden, not a prize. They demand a tribute of life, and pay back only with death. They bind you to the guardianship of a terrible secret, one that turned his mother into a bitter old woman long before her time. If the wielder wants his advice, he says to cast the **Golden Hand** away.

However, if the **Golden Hand**'s wielder is determined to continue their quest, he will relent and fully unlock the gun's device drivers for them. This gives the PCs a constant navigational feed on the other gun, allowing them to track its location through the Muse. This, Ten says, will almost certainly allow them to meet Hope.

Before they leave, he makes one thing very clear: despite all that has passed between them, Ten still loves his mother. Should the wielder do *any* harm to her, he *will* hunt them down and before they die, they will regret ever being born.

INTERLUDE 5A:
A THORN ON YOUR SIDE

Once the wielder of the **Golden Hand** has completed Striga's errand, they can return to her to find out what was contained on Thorn's old datavault. There's a *lot* of stuff on there, and it takes a while to sift through it to find the relevant files, but eventually, Striga finds it: a long series of navigational coordinates, tracking the L4 Lagrange point of Chameleon for more than 200 years. This is what the old satellite above Zethus was hiding.

Travelling out to this destination is a dangerous and lonely journey, even if taken at nearlight. Chameleon had emergency supply caches and comms repeaters, but all there is in this place is endless dark, cold and silence. There really is *nothing* out here.

Except, carefully hidden in a crevasse on a particularly large trojan asteroid, there it is: the *Persimmon*, the fabled colony ship Impact Dynamics sent to the system three centuries ago. Two kilometers long, radiators cold, engines long dead, spin-grav rings cracked and broken from three hundred years of neglect, it waits patiently for Gaia worlds that never existed and a rescuer that never arrived.

The wielder cannot dock with the *Persimmon* directly; it would be dangerous to bring their ship too close to the colony vessel's decayed superstructure. They will have to land a few kilometers out and approach in their mech. On foot won't do; the **Golden Hand** makes it known, in its own way, that it and the mech it's attached to must be brought along.

Getting onto the ship like this is a slow process. The only visible point of entry is a vehicle bay on the starboard side that looks like it was blown open by breaching charges. Someone was definitely here, but decades ago.

INTERLUDE 5B:
THE *PERSIMMON*

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The Crimson Hand

Auxiliary CQB, Exotic Gear, Loading, Reliable 1, Unique

[⟋5] [⌘3] [1d6⌀]

If this weapon starts a turn loaded, every weapon in this mount gains **+1**⯐ on attacks this turn.

If you install the **Crimson Hand** in the same mount as the **Golden Hand**, they count as only one piece of Exotic Gear for installation limits.

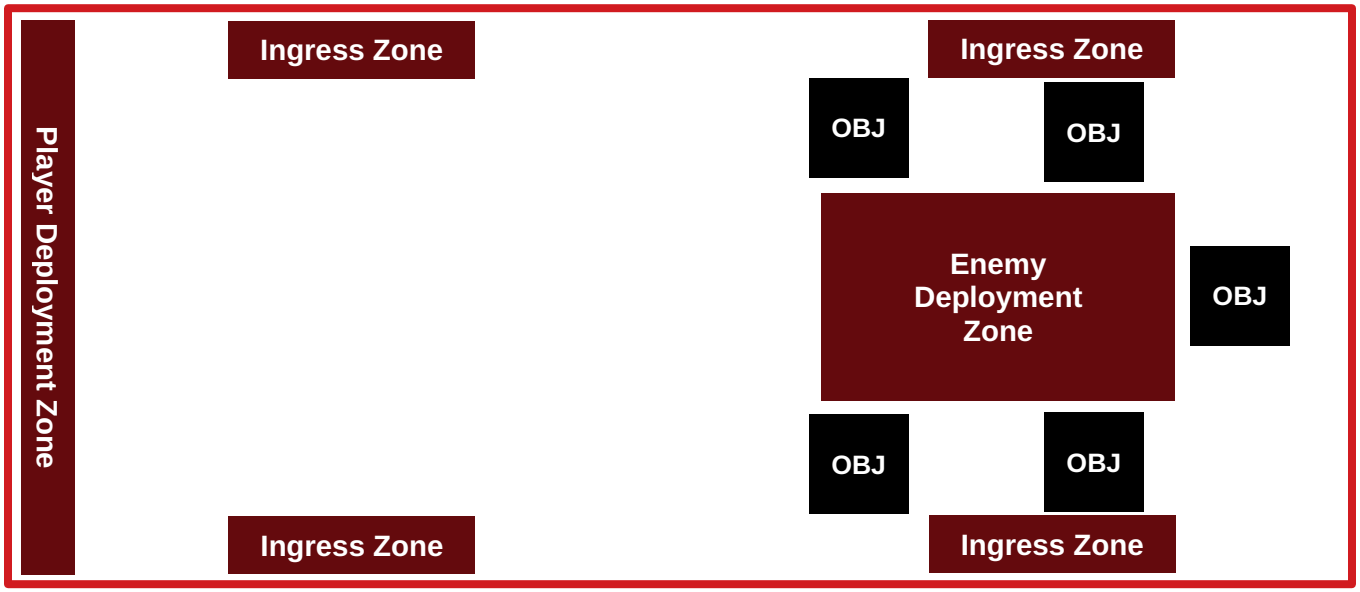
Zhihao always hit her mark, and she couldn't afford not to: she was clumsy on the reload. Marika took aim at her fumbling, because she knew it set Zhihao's teeth grinding.

When your mech levels it, you smell cherry wine and coffee, hear the clatter of dice, and feel the corners of your mouth pulled upwards into a cocky grin.

NEW SITREPS

Presented

DEMOLITION



Just a babysitting job, the Navy said. Spend five years in the boonies, the Navy said. You'll never see a single fight but it'll look good on your record, the Navy said. Scarab wanted to wring their necks, but this posting had put him ten light-years away from them.

So here he was, churning acid sky of Orcus warping the skin of his rig like lemon juice curdling milk, external temperature at 400 Kelvin even in the perpetual twilight of the planet's duskline. Bullets ripped at the weather station he was cowering behind. Explosions rang out, one after another, shaking the entire aerostat like the clenched fist of the Infinite.

Scarab's platoon was never going to hold the platform, not against an assault this determined by enemies this numerous. But maybe, he thought, they didn't need to. All they needed was to deny the Cult use of it, and without the processing units, the aerostat was about as useful as fingerless spacesuit gloves.

There was a chime as his howitzer reloaded, and he smirked. "Xanadu, contact the Thames. I'm submitting a request to modify mission parameters."

DEMOLITION missions require the PCs to destroy a series of static targets on the battlefield.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

- **PC Victory:** At the end of the eighth round, all **Objectives** are destroyed.
- **Enemy Victory:** At the end of the eighth round, at least one **Objective** has not been destroyed.

OBJECTIVE

Each Objective is a **SIZE 3** character hostile to the PCs with **5 EVASION**, **8 E-DEFENSE** and **15/20/25 HP**. They do not take turns or actions, cannot move or be moved by any means, are **IMMUNE** to all statuses and conditions except **LOCK ON**, and clear all **burn** ( ) after the initial damage has been dealt. They benefit from cover and other defenses as usual, and make all mech skill checks and saves at **+0**.

Optionally, the GM may give the Objectives **1** or **2 ARMOR** or the **SIEGE ARMOR** trait.

SIEGE ARMOR Trait

The Objective has **Resistance** to all damage from attacks that originate beyond **3**.

ENEMY FORCES

The GM should prepare about one and half times the enemy forces that they would normally use. Two thirds of these forces should be deployed, and the remaining third held as **Reinforcements**.

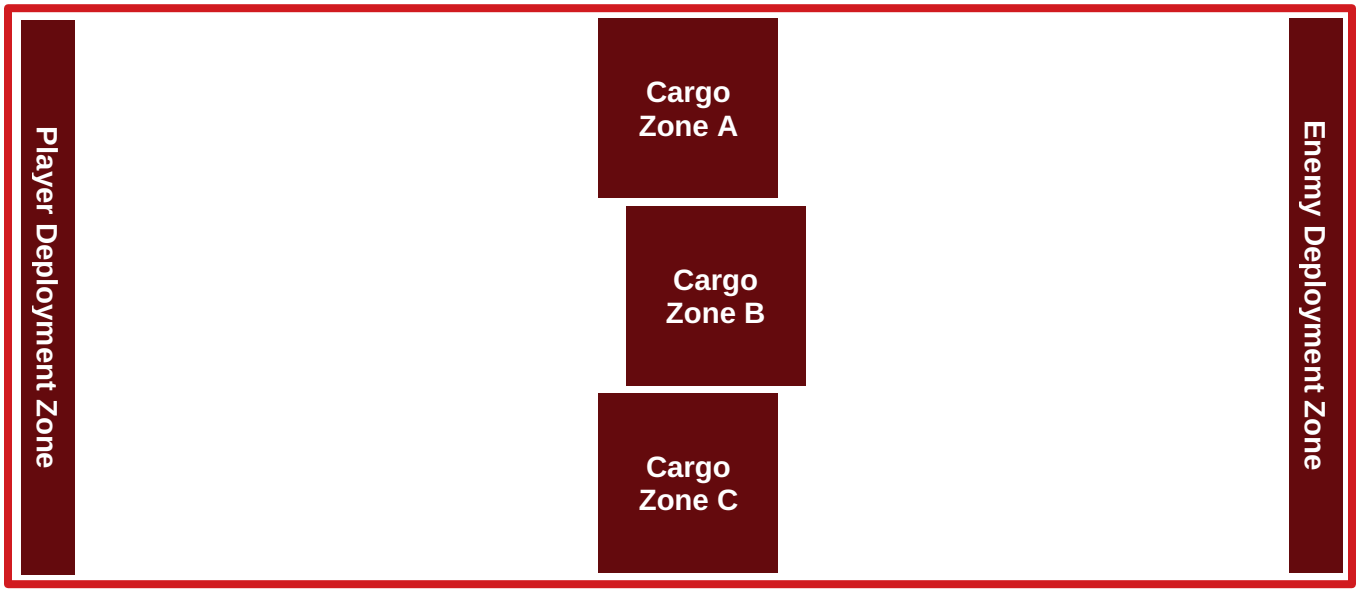
DEPLOYMENT

The GM deploys first, placing five Objectives close to (but not inside) the **Enemy Deployment Zone**, and then deploys the enemy forces; the PCs deploy next, choosing positions for their characters in the **Player Deployment Zone**.

REINFORCEMENTS

At the start of any round, the GM deploys **2 NPCs** (or up to **4 grunts**) in two of the **Ingress Zones**. They can't deploy in the same **Ingress Zone** twice in a row.

THEFT



Blue gritted her teeth and slammed the medical holdoff button with her good hand. This "simple smash-and-grab" had turned into a shitshow, and she'd need to stay focused to make it out alive.

With both legs broken and only one hand working, she had to lean on the neural link to send instructions to the horse. It wasn't doing any better; that last hit had smashed all the actuators in its right arm – but its fist was still clenched tight around the power core's carrying handle. She could work with this.

Flipping the assault rifle's targeting to eyeline mode and yanking the throttle back as far as it would go, she rested her finger on the trigger of the joystick and began a defiant chant over an open channel.

"M-S-M-C! YOU-CAN'T-TAKE-ME!"

THEFT missions require the PCs to dash onto the battlefield, steal valuable items and then return them safely to an extraction zone.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

- **PC Victory:** At the end of the sixth round, there are at least as many **Payloads** in the **Player Deployment Zone** as PCs participating in the scene.
- **Enemy Victory:** At the end of the sixth round, there are fewer **Payloads** in the **Player Deployment Zone** than PCs participating in the scene.

SUPPLY EXTRACTION

Place three ⊛**1 Cargo Zones** on the battlefield. Characters inside or adjacent to a **Cargo Zone** may perform the following action:

Extract Supplies
Quick Action

You may only perform this action while inside or adjacent to a **Cargo Zone** that has no **Payloads** in it. Place a **Payload** in a free space within the same **Cargo Zone**, or as close as possible.

Payloads are **Size 1** objects with **10 HP**, **EVASION 10**, **E-DEFENSE 10** and no **ARMOR**. Enemy forces will not willingly damage them. **Payloads** can't move under their own power, so mechs must **drag** them, becoming **SLOWED** while doing so. If two characters from opposing sides are adjacent to a **Payload**, neither of them can **drag** it until one of them ceases to be adjacent.

PCs must move the **Payloads** into the **Player Deployment Zone**. Enemies will try to move the **Payloads** back to a **Cargo Zone**, but no further.

ENEMY FORCES

The GM should prepare enemy forces of a similar size to a normal encounter. They can hold some as **Reinforcements** if desired.

DEPLOYMENT

The GM deploys first, placing the three **Cargo Zones** and then placing the initial enemy complement in the **Enemy Deployment Zone**. The PCs deploy next, choosing positions for their characters in the **Player Deployment Zone**.

NEW NPC CLASSES

Presented here are four new classes of NPC for players to fight. They're introduced throughout the course of **Act 1**, but can be used in any campaign.

- The **LODESTONE**, a hybrid Artillery/Controller mech that can pull enemies around the battlefield and punish them for grouping up.

SIZE 1

LODESTONE

Artillery/Controller

Leaning heavily into the magnetic weapons technology pioneered by Smith-Shimano frames such as the Black Witch, the Lodestone can pull an enemy fireteam apart, figuratively and literally. In the aftermath of their deployment, they leave alien landscapes littered with wrecks in strange places, pierced by eerily precise shots and covered in spikes of congealed ferrofluid.

TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
MECH SKILLS	**MECH SKILLS**	**MECH SKILLS**
Hull: -2	**Hull:** -2	**Hull:** -1
Agility: +3	**Agility:** +4	**Agility:** +5
Systems: +1	**Systems:** +2	**Systems:** +3
Engineering: +0	**Engineering:** +1	**Engineering:** +1
CORE STATS	**CORE STATS**	**CORE STATS**
HP: 10	**HP:** 12	**HP:** 14
Evasion: 8	**Evasion:** 10	**Evasion:** 12
Speed: 4	**Speed:** 4	**Speed:** 4
Heat Cap: 7	**Heat Cap:** 7	**Heat Cap:** 7
Sensors: 10	**Sensors:** 10	**Sensors:** 10
Armor: 0	**Armor:** 0	**Armor:** 0
E-Defense: 12	**E-Defense:** 14	**E-Defense:** 16
Size: 1	**Size:** 1	**Size:** 1
Save Target: 12	**Save Target:** 14	**Save Target:** 16

TACTICS

The Lodestone likes to target bunched-up enemies, especially those providing hard cover to their allies with a trait like **Guardian**. Since the **Precision Railgun** can strike multiple targets, if it hits two characters at once, **Spallation** will trigger on both of them. It can use **Ferrous Lash** to force characters together.

Even with **Repulsion**, the Lodestone is very fragile and relies mostly on positioning and cover to avoid damage.

BASE SYSTEMS

Precision Railgun

Heavy Rifle, AP, +2/+4/+6
[⇗10] [4/6/8⌀]

SPALLATION Trait

Each character adjacent to at least one character hit by the Lodestone's weapon attacks takes **3/4/5**⌀. Characters only take this damage once per attack the Lodestone makes.

Ferrous Lash

System, Quick Action

A hostile character within **Sensors** must succeed on an **Agility** save or be pulled 3 spaces in a direction of the Lodestone's choice.

REPULSION Trait

The Lodestone has **Resistance** to ⌀.

OPTIONAL SYSTEMS

Core Feedback Loop

System, Quick Tech, +2/+4/+6

The Lodestone makes a **tech attack** against a character within **Sensors**. On a success, the target takes **4/5/6** ⚷ at the end of their next turn unless they're adjacent to an allied character.

Disruptive Pulse

System, Full Tech, Recharge 6+

Each hostile character within a △**7** area must make a **Systems** save or become **Jammed** until the end of their next turn, or until an allied character ends their turn adjacent to them.

RESCUE Trait

Ferrous Lash can target allied characters. They may choose to fail the save.

HYPERFRAGMENTATION Trait

The damage from **Spallation** is **AP**.

UNNATURAL PRECISION Trait

Spallation only damages hostile characters.

Magnetic Grenade

System, Quick Action, Grenade, Recharge 5+

The Lodestone throws a grenade to a space within ⟋**10**. Characters in the ensuing ⊛**2** explosion must make a **Hull** save or be pulled as close to the center of the blast as possible.

SIZE 1/2

RUINER

Striker/Controller

After IPS-N's Titan-Enceladus Field Project produced the Caliban, other arms manufacturers were quick to produce their own variants or knock-offs. Nothing quite compares to the original model, but if the corpses on ten thousand gutted derelicts could speak, they'd tell you that 80% of a Caliban is more than enough.

TIER 1

MECH SKILLS

Hull: +2 **Systems:** -2
Agility: +1 **Engineering:** +2

CORE STATS

HP: 12 **Armor:** 2
Evasion: 8 **E-Defense:** 8
Speed: 4 **Size:** 1/2
Heat Cap: 6 **Save Target:** 12
Sensors: 5

TIER 2

MECH SKILLS

Hull: +4 **Systems:** -2
Agility: +1 **Engineering:** +3

CORE STATS

HP: 14 **Armor:** 2
Evasion: 9 **E-Defense:** 8
Speed: 4 **Size:** 1/2
Heat Cap: 7 **Save Target:** 14
Sensors: 5

TIER 3

MECH SKILLS

Hull: +6 **Systems:** -2
Agility: +1 **Engineering:** +4

CORE STATS

HP: 16 **Armor:** 2
Evasion: 10 **E-Defense:** 8
Speed: 4 **Size:** 1/2
Heat Cap: 8 **Save Target:** 16
Sensors: 5

TACTICS

The Ruiner is easiest to describe as a "bully" – it wants to get up close with one enemy and then shove them around with **RAM** attacks and its **HEAVY SCATTERGUN**. It isn't actually that fast, though, so it will want to make judicious use of its **ASSAULT BOOSTER** to close gaps. Note that even with 2 **ARMOR**, it doesn't always have as much staying power as you think, because it needs to stay on the front line to be effective.

BASE SYSTEMS

Heavy Scattergun

Heavy CQB, +2/+4/+6, Knockback 2
[3] [3] [4/6/8]

On Critical Hit: The target must succeed on a **HULL** save or be knocked **PRONE**.

DENSE — Trait

The Ruiner counts as **SIZE 3** when inflicting **KNOCKBACK** with any **RAM**, **melee** or **ranged attack**.

Assault Booster

System, Quick Action, Recharge 4+

The Ruiner **flies** up to their speed in any direction, but must land after completing the move. If they end this movement adjacent to a hostile character, they may **RAM** that character as part of the same action.

OPTIONAL SYSTEMS

BODYBLOCK — Trait

The Ruiner can use adjacent hostile characters for **hard cover**. Missed attacks against the Ruiner affected by this **hard cover** apply **Reliable** damage to the character providing cover, not the Ruiner.

FACESHOT — Trait

When the Ruiner is **ENGAGED** with a character, it can choose to target only that character with its **HEAVY SCATTERGUN**. If it does, the attack doesn't gain **DIFFICULTY** from being **ENGAGED**, its damage ignores **RESISTANCE** and any **KNOCKBACK** inflicted is increased by 1.

FOLLOW THROUGH — Trait

When the Ruiner inflicts **KNOCKBACK** as part of any action, it can move an **equal number of spaces towards the same target by the most direct route possible**. This movement is part of the same action, ignores engagement and doesn't provoke reactions.

OFFENSIVE PRESSURE — Trait

When the Ruiner inflicts damage with a **melee** or **ranged** attack, their next attack deals **+3/+4/+5 bonus damage**. Bonuses are lost when the Ruiner attacks (hit or miss), when they take damage, at the end of their next turn, or if the Ruiner becomes **JAMMED** or **STUNNED**.

Seething Malice

Reaction, 1/round

Trigger: The Ruiner takes damage from a **ranged attack** made by a character within 4 and **ASSAULT BOOSTER** is available.

Effect: The Ruiner uses **ASSAULT BOOSTER**, moving adjacent to the triggering character. If the **RAM** hits, the Ruiner gains **Resistance to all damage from the triggering attack**.

SIZE 1

VOIDER

Controller/Support

"Did you think, Valentinian - even for a moment - of what you might unleash when you embarked on this damn fool crusade? I've seen what your projects leave in their wake. In the name of the friendship we used to share, I beg you, turn back before you do something you cannot undo!"

- Dr. Sébastien Dumas

TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
MECH SKILLS	**MECH SKILLS**	**MECH SKILLS**
Hull: -1	**Systems:** +2	**Hull:** -1	**Systems:** +3	**Hull:** -1	**Systems:** +4
Agility: +1	**Engineering:** +2	**Agility:** +2	**Engineering:** +3	**Agility:** +2	**Engineering:** +4
CORE STATS	**CORE STATS**	**CORE STATS**
HP: 10	**Armor:** 1	**HP:** 12	**Armor:** 1	**HP:** 14	**Armor:** 1
Evasion: 10	**E-Defense:** 10	**Evasion:** 12	**E-Defense:** 12	**Evasion:** 14	**E-Defense:** 14
Speed: 4	**Size:** 1	**Speed:** 4	**Size:** 1	**Speed:** 4	**Size:** 1
Heat Cap: 7	**Save Target:** 12	**Heat Cap:** 7	**Save Target:** 14	**Heat Cap:** 7	**Save Target:** 16
Sensors: 10		**Sensors:** 10		**Sensors:** 10	

TACTICS

Placeholder.

BASE SYSTEMS

Blink Rift

Trait, Protocol

The Voider creates a **BLINK RIFT** in a free space within ⟋**5**. A **BLINK RIFT** is a **Size 1** object that projects a constant ⦿**2 distortion field** around it. While inside the **distortion field**:

- Voiders are **IMMUNE** to all of its effects.
- Hostile characters are **SLOWED** and can't take **reactions**, and if they start their turn in the field, these effects persist until the end of that turn.

BLINK RIFTS have **4/6/8 HP**, **EVASION 10, E-DEFENSE 10** and can't be targeted by **tech attacks**. When a **BLINK RIFT** is destroyed, each non-Voider character within the distortion field must make a **HULL** save or be pulled into the space the rift occupied, or as close as possible.

The Voider can have up to three **BLINK RIFTS** active at the same time. The **distortion fields** of **BLINK RIFTS** can overlap, but their effects don't stack.

SHORTCUT Trait, Quick Action

This action can only be taken while adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT**. The Voider **teleports** to a space adjacent to another **BLINK RIFT**.

Void Prism

Main Cannon, +2/+4/+6, Arcing
[⟋5] [4/6/8 ϟ]

If the target is a **BLINK RIFT**, this attack automatically hits. The Voider may then repeat this attack against any number of characters or objects within ⟋**5** of the rift, drawing line of sight and range from it. If this includes another **BLINK RIFT**, the process repeats. A character can only be targeted by a secondary attack once per activation of this weapon.

After a **BLINK RIFT** is struck by this weapon (whether or not the Voider chose to make secondary attacks) it is destroyed, causing it to collapse as usual.

OPTIONAL SYSTEMS

Abduct

System, Quick Tech, +2/+4/+6

The Voider makes a **tech attack** against a hostile character within ⟋**5**. On a success, the target is **teleported** adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT** of the Voider's choice.

GRAVITATIONAL LENSING Trait

The Voider's allies have **soft cover** while they're entirely within the **distortion field** of a **BLINK RIFT**.

IMPLOSION ENGINE Trait

Characters who fail the **HULL** save from a collapsing **BLINK RIFT** also become **IMMOBILIZED** until the end of their next turn.

BLINK INTERCEPTION Trait, Reaction

Teleporting triggers the Voider's reactions as if it were normal movement. The Voider also gains the **Redirect** reaction.

Redirect

Reaction, 1/round, Limited 3/4/5

Trigger: A character **teleports** or is **teleported** within the Voider's line of sight while the Voider has at least one **BLINK RIFT** active.

Effect: The triggering character **teleports** to a space adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT** chosen by the Voider instead of their intended destination. This doesn't count as involuntary movement.

Reposition

System, Quick Action, Recharge 4+

The Voider may **teleport** one allied character within **SENSORS** to a space of their choice adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT**.

Rift Stabilizer

System

The Voider's allies can also use **SHORTCUT**, and the Voider counts as a **BLINK RIFT** for this purpose.

Slip Drive

System

The Voider can use **SHORTCUT** even when it's not adjacent to a **BLINK RIFT**.

Warp Carbine

Main Rifle, +2/+4/+6, AP

[5] [2/3/4]

On hit: The target must make an **ENGINEERING** save or be **teleported** towards the origin of this attack a number of spaces equal to the damage dealt by this weapon.

The Voider may draw range and line of sight for attacks with this weapon from a **BLINK RIFT** instead of itself.